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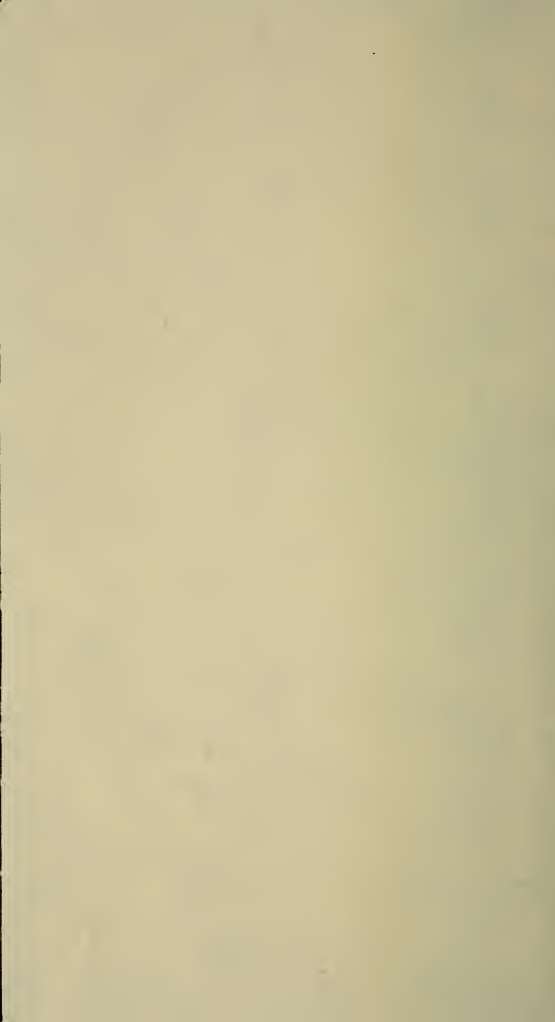


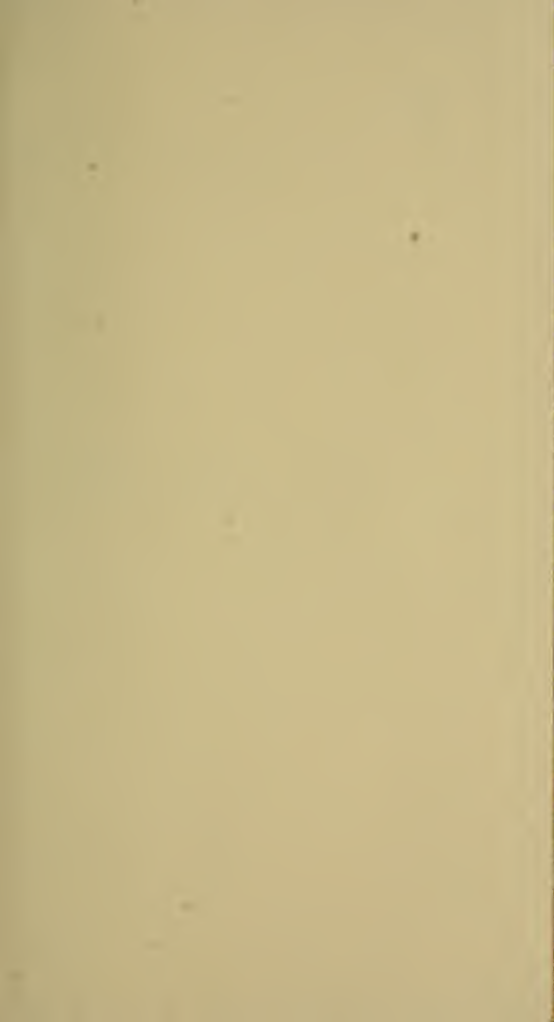
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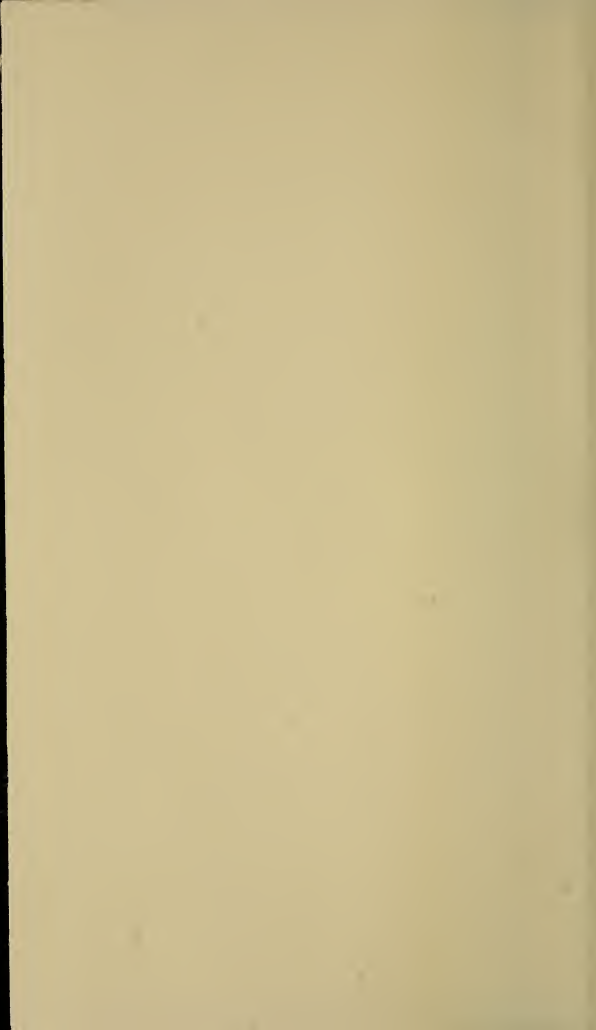






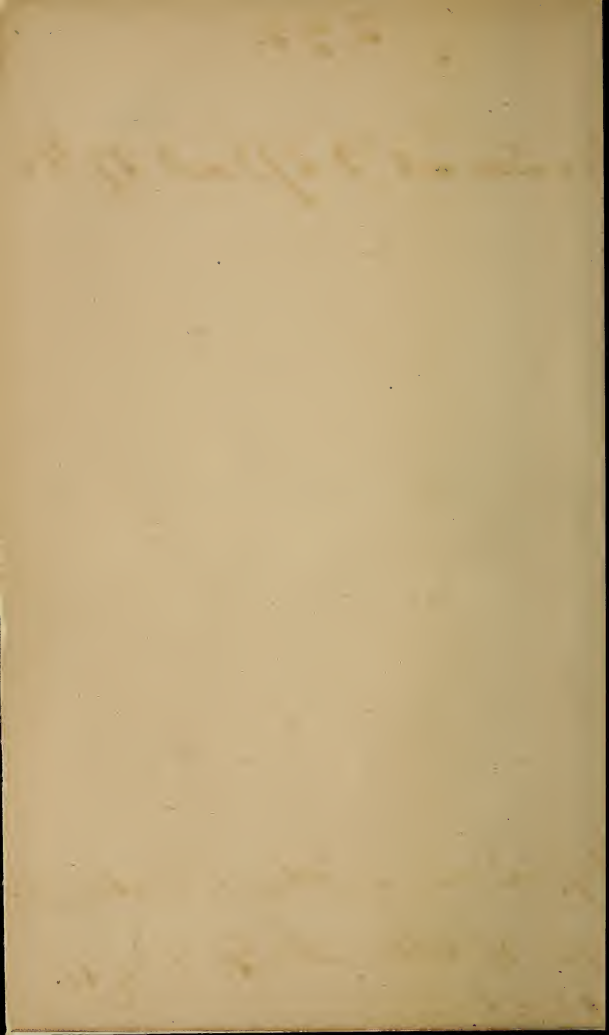






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“THE VERY AGE!”



295.

"THE VERY AGE!"

Record at Dep't of State 17/50

A Comedy,

IN FIVE ACTS.

" — to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature ; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and *the very age* and body of the time his form and pressure."

HAMLET.

BY

EDWARD S. GOULD



NEW-YORK:

D. APPLETON & COMPANY, 200 BROADWAY.

PHILADELPHIA :

GEO. S. APPLETON, 164 CHESNUT-STREET.

M.DCCC.L.

*Deposited in the Clerk's Office
S. Dist. N. Y. July 11.
1850.*

PS 1758
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1850

ENTERED, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1850, by
EDWARD S. GOULD,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Southern District of
New-York.

AS A PASSING COMPLIMENT TO
A FAR-OFF FRIEND,
THOUGH WITH NO OTHER AUTHORITY THAN
THE GENERAL SANCTION OF A FIRM FRIENDSHIP,
THIS LOCAL TRIFLE
Is Inscribed
TO
WM. C. MACREADY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It is just possible that, at a time when theatrical "novelties" are rare, some manager may be inclined to hazard this play upon the stage. To such a one—should there be such a one—the writer, in a spirit of courtesy, desires to say that he does not intend, by publishing the play, to waive his right of controlling its performance.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

MR. ERSKINE, *a New-York Millionaire.*

CHARLES RODNEY, *pretending to be Count de Bressi.*

DOCTOR STUBBS, *a Physician.*

FREDERICK SOMERVILLE, *in love with Clara.*

ALFRED SPOONEY, *a Dandy just returned from the grand
tour.*

SERVANTS.

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| MRS. RODNEY, | } | <i>fashionable Ladies of a certain age.</i> |
| MRS. JENKINS, | | |
| MRS. SPRIGGINS, | | |
| MRS. SPOONEY, | | |

MISS LARKINS, *a Fashionable Young Lady.*

TABITHA PIPPIN, *an Old Maid from the Country.*

CLARA ERSKINE, *Erskine's Daughter.*

SERVANTS.

SCENE, *New-York.* TIME, 1850.

“THE VERY AGE!”

ACT FIRST.

SCENE I.

Mrs. Rodney's residence : representing two connected New-York parlours. The rooms are well furnished and lighted : and suggest, by their appearance, the close of a fashionable ball.

MRS. RODNEY is sitting : a fan in her hand ; half lost in thought. A SERVANT in attendance.

MRS. R. John—how late is it ?

SERV. Half past three, madam.

MRS. R. What is so desolate, so mocking to the heart's gaiety, as a ball-room, when the guests

have departed? The life and fashion of the town were here, but now; and now, the very silence of the rooms is oppressive.—Is the company all gone?

SERV. I believe, madam, three or four ladies are yet in the dressing-rooms, and two gentlemen are in the hall.

MRS. R. If the Count de Bressi is there, say I would speak a word with him.

Exit SERVANT.

A brilliant affair, in its way; yet what is it, after all? A crowd of people; a din of music; a bustle of dancing; a throng around the supper-table; and home at three in the morning. But, though balls are in some points alike everywhere, and are sufficiently stupid anywhere; commend me, for the supremacy of dullness, to the fashionable circle of this city of New-York—where all that indicates *mind* is proscribed, and where the jingle of the pocket is the touchstone of exclusiveness.

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

My dear Count, that would be; my son Charles,

that is ; give me leave to congratulate you. You have played the Count this evening to perfection.

CHAS. Don't overpraise me, mother. It is very easy to play the Count in New-York. One has but to assume a title, invent a bow, walk on his toes and talk broken English :—not one of the fashionables will question his nobility, especially if his moustaches are greased to a point. Besides, my forged letters of introduction are as good vouchers for my title as Barings' letters of credit would be for my currency—in all the senses of that significant word.

MRS. R. Very true ; and the joke, so far, is good. But we must keep our own counsel, for it will not end in a joke.—How many conquests to-night, Charles ?

CHAS. Some half a dozen, I believe : but I specially affect that Miss Erskine, whose grim-looking father followèd us about like a thunder-cloud. Egad ! for all his frowns, the girl is out-and-out in love with me. And, what is more strange, and altogether superfluous, upon my word I feel a strong affection for her. There is some-

thing odd in it: it's a new sentiment: it puzzles me.

MRS. R. (*Aside.*) Strange sympathy of nature! But that train of thought might lead him to a premature suspicion in the disclosure I am about to make.—Good for a beginning, Charles! Secure *her*, and both your fortune and my purpose are secured. Her father is the man of whom I have spoken so often.

CHAS. Ay, of whom you have spoken so often, and told so little. What is your purpose with him?

MRS. R. I will marry him—or, be revenged on him!

CHAS. You must give me your confidence, if I am to cöoperate in your revenge. How has he wronged you?

MRS. R. As man, at the utmost, can wrong woman. The time for hesitancy, Charles, is past; for our common purpose requires a reciprocal confidence. In a word, then,—although it is the last truth that a mother should reveal—he wooed, deceived, and abandoned me.

CHAS. Good heaven! He! When? Where?

MRS. R. In my almost childhood, at Kingston, in the West Indies. There were two years of joy! One, as his companion: one, as a too happy mother.—Never jump to a conclusion! Child! would I tell you this, if *you* were that son? I recount my wrongs to explain my motives for revenge. (*Aside.*) And if I deceive you on this point, it is to secure my revenge.—Erskine deserted me on my boy's first birthday: but I smothered my grief: I toiled in obscurity for wages: I bided my time: I made my way into the family of a rich bachelor; I married him: and, became your mother. Your father, at his death, parted his ample fortune between us. You roved the world over and expended your inheritance. I made my home with my husband's relatives in England until your demands on my purse, and another reason, induced me to emigrate to this receptacle of European varieties. I have been here a twelvemonth; established myself in fashionable society; given you, to-night, an introduction to the same class, as the noble Count de Bressi,—and now, the world is before us.

CHAS. This is intelligible. But how will my marrying Miss Erskine promote *your* object?

MRS. R. Her father's fortune would supply your extravagance, which has half impoverished mine: then, if Erskine refuse my suit, were it not revenge to aid in marrying his daughter to an impostor?

CHAS. I see that; but why would you marry Erskine?

MRS. R. Because I love him still! Besides, I long to subdue the lofty, indomitable millionaire, whose will is law to so many of his fellow-citizens. I would conquer the conqueror.

CHAS. Has he recognised you?

MRS. R. Never; unless to-night. I have carefully avoided him, until now: although, indeed, my face and form, with thirty years' change, might defy his scrutiny. But to-night, he started at the familiar sound of my voice. The tone that has once conveyed the accents of love, is never forgotten.

CHAS. We have a notable conspiracy on our hands! I am plotting to get this man's daughter

for a wife, under pretext of being the Count de Bressi, and-so-forth, and-so-forth, all the way from Bavaria. You, as a rich English widow, purpose to marry the millionaire, or punish him for contumacy. Well, for to-night, good night. Our tactics are to disguise our relationship of mother and son?

MRS. R. For the present, yes; and observe one thing especially. Never let Erskine see you without a glove on your left hand.

CHAS. What! Can the maimed finger and the strawberry-mark weigh down the title?

MRS. R. Certainly not, of themselves: but I have a reason for this caution.

CHAS. Doubtless! With all your confidings you women must always have one secret quite to yourselves. (*Aside.*) And *this* secret it happens to be my fancy to discover.—By the by, if these marks would disturb Erskine, might they not affect others? I had better wear my glove constantly and pass it off on these worshippers of foreign customs as a mark of aristocratic breeding.

Mrs. R. Very true, Charles. You are apt. I should have thought of that! Good night.

Exit CHARLES.

The time may be at hand when those marks will be called to tell their story: but in the meantime, they must not betray Charles's identity to Erskine. —Erskine! you little thought when you abandoned the poor West Indian girl, that she could trace you to your home in America; still less did you think she could come so armed as to claim and enforce justice at your hands.

Exit.

SCENE II.

Mrs. Spriggins's.

Servants bring and place chairs, &c.

Enter MRS. SPRIGGINS.

MRS. S. Come! come! be quick about this! Past two o'clock, and my rooms not in order! Here have seventeen cards been left and Mrs. Spriggins still "invisible." It will be the ruin of me! my first reception of the season, too.—There! answer the bell, some of you. What are you waiting for?

Exeunt SERVANTS.

•

(looking at cards.) Mrs. Jenkins! Stupid creatures! I wouldn't have missed Mrs. Jenkins for as many footmen as could stand between here and the Battery.

Enter MRS. SPOONEY *and* ALFRED.

My dear Mrs. Spooney, I am delighted to see you. Is this Alfred? What could induce him to come back so soon?

MRS. SP. He has been four weeks on the Continent, my dear; and what would be the use of his making the grand tour, if he did not return at the commencement of our fashionable season to tell all about his travels?

MRS. S. How he has altered! Such a foreign air! But don't you think his hair and moustaches are a little too long?

MRS. SP. Not at all. They are not only elegant and manly: they are all the fashion abroad. The people admired him so at Mrs. Rodney's ball: he was a real lion.

MRS. S. At least, he did not lack the *mane*. But, about the ball; who was there?

MRS. SP. Everybody. Such a crowd! Such a display! For New-York, it was quite passable; —wasn't it, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in Paris, my lady d'Orleans

gave a ball: and, as to style, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. SP. It's no use talking, Mrs. Spriggins. We have almost no quality in this country: have we, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in Vienna, my lady Metternich gave just a morning soirée: and as to quality, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. S. Well, Mrs. Rodney's furniture is superb?

MRS. SP. Nothing remarkable: is it, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in Moscow, Nicholas invited me to a private breakfast: and, as to furniture, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. SP. Mrs. Rodney's furniture is perhaps well enough for New-York: but her rooms were shockingly lighted: weren't they, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in Madrid, I assisted at a levee of the Infanta; and, as to light, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. SP. Just as light as day! and the air was perfumed like a Paradise: wasn't it, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in Constantinople, I went

to a hop in the seraglio ; and, as to perfumes, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. S. Mrs. Rodney must have had something passable : how was her supper ?

MRS. SP. So so : wasn't it, Alfred ?

ALF. When I was in London, I lunched with Wellington : and, as to dishes, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. S. Her music, then, was good ?

MRS. SP. Mere scraping : wasn't it, Alfred ?

ALF. When I was in Rome, I attended a rehearsal at the Vatican : and, as to music, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. S. Then I take my stand on the dresses of the ladies ; they, surely, were elegant ?

MRS. SP. Plenty of expense, but not a particle of taste : was there, Alfred ?

ALF. When I was in Florence, I dined with the Duke of Tuscany ; and, as to dresses, really, 'pon my honour—

Enter MISS LARKINS.

MRS. S. My dear Miss Larkins, I had almost

given you up, for to-day. I must introduce you, my dear.—I know what you are going to say: it is quite out of rule to introduce of a morning; but Mr. Spooney has so much to tell about Europe——la! I forgot. I was just going to present you to your old beau. Never mind: Mr. Spooney returned yesterday from the grand tour.

ALF. Eh, the day before yesterday. Miss Larkins, I have the honour, et cetera. Eh, the ladies, Miss Larkins, have undertaken to tell me about style and fashion in this country; but I have so recently been at fountain-head, that, really, 'pon my honour—

MRS. S. We have nothing in New-York, Miss Larkins; nothing: Mr. Spooney will allow us nothing.

MISS L. Not even beautiful women, Mr. Spooney?

ALF. Eh, as to women, Miss Larkins, really, 'pon my honour—

Enter DOCTOR STUBBS.

DOCT. S. My lady Spriggins, yours, truly.

Lady Spooney, your most obedient. My lady hostess, I have left three men with broken arms and five babies in convulsions, to attend your first reception. How do you find yourself, dear lady? Pulse, a little quick; skin, a little dry; eyes, heavy; breath, like a bed of roses. You'll do, my dear, for to-day. Well—who's dead? Who's married? Who's going to be married? In short, what's the news?

MRS. S. Nothing is newer than Mrs. Rodney's ball. Mrs. Spooney was just telling us about it.

DOCT. S. Ah, my lady Spooney. No one so competent to observe; no one so capable to describe. You know, lady, I am every thing by turns and nothing long. For once, let me be a listener.

MRS. SP. That, doctor, is impossible.

DOCT. S. Not when *you* speak, lady. Try me. How was Mrs. Rodney?

MRS. SP. By herself and of herself, elegant. She presided like a queen. But then, you know, she is descended from one of the first families in England.

MRS. S. I wonder if that is true.

MRS. SP. My dear Mrs. Spriggins, you are as incredulous as an infidel. Didn't my poor, dear, departed husband's brother invest her money in the public stocks? And hadn't she letters? And are not crests and coats-of-arms embroidered on her very horse-blankets? It's a positive fact, doctor.

DOCT. S. Lady, I listen.

MRS. S. Then we'll waive that. Was Mr. Erskine there?

MRS. SP. Yes—and it's very odd! Clara Erskine, who, you know, is as good as engaged to Frederick Somerville, was so smitten with the Count de Bressi, that, they do say, Frederick will be jilted to a certainty. Indeed—but this is quite between ourselves—Mrs. Jenkins says she'll do her best to make a match of it: and when Mrs. Jenkins does her best, in that line, we all know what to expect.

MRS. S. Very true: I doubt if Mrs. Jenkins has her match at match-making on this side of the Atlantic.

MRS. SP. Her success is truly wonderful. But, as I was saying; Mr. Erskine was terribly annoyed at Clara's conduct; and, what is the greatest news of all, Erskine is himself desperately smitten with Mrs. Rodney.

MRS. S. That's capital! But the Count; what of him?

MRS. SP. Ah, my dear, now you come to something worth talking about. He is none of your counterfeit lords: no Baron Van Hoffman: his manners show that at a glance. You ought to see him enter a room: and, when he is introduced, oh, magnificent! Alfred, who has visited all the European nobility, says his air is unmistakeable.

MRS. S. I hope he received a favourable impression of our society. I do hope he encountered none of the mushroom gentry at Mrs. Rodney's.

✓ DOCT. S. Mrs. Spriggins, you astonish me! None of the mushroom gentry? Pray, what have we *but* mushroom gentry, in our so-called high society? Are not the very proudest and most assuming people in New-York the children of mechanics?—wasn't old Popkins a tailor? and wasn't

old Crickson, a cooper? and old Bang-up, a pedlar? and old Rumble, the lord knows what? Lady, the mushroom gentry are *the* gentry; and what they lack in brains and breeding, they make up with gold and eke out with brass.

MRS. S. But, doctor! you must except the Smiths and the Browns?

DOCT. S. And the present company. True, you may except them; you may except half-a-dozen families who can trace their pedigree back for fifty years without stumbling over cabbage, hoop-poles and wooden-nutmegs. But these exceptions indicate just the people who don't assume offensive and ridiculous airs. The man who has risen from honest poverty to honest affluence deserves high praise—provided, he is not ashamed of his origin: but those who are mean enough to deny what they came from; who, in the day of prosperity, turn their backs on their former associates, and treat with disdain the equally worthy but less fortunate members of the class whence they themselves have recently sprung—these are but beggars on horse-back, for all their up-town palaces.

MRS. S. That's just my opinion, doctor.—Besides, some of our exclusives are a little deficient in character.

MRS. SP. Such as who?

MRS. S. Well—Mrs. Tippet. She allows Mr. Brag to be constant in morning calls and afternoon drives; and she has been seen——

DOCT. S. Yes: they do say those things about Mrs. Tippet. But, you must remember, lady, that our real tip-top high-flyers imitate *all* the European customs; and a little latitude in the matter of conquests is absolutely necessary: they couldn't get on without it: it gives a zest to their reputation—as a taint does to the flavour of a woodcock.

MRS. S. Since it's the fashion, then, we'll pass over several in that category. But there's old Bolus: 'he was caught smuggling jew's-harps through the Custom House.

DOCT. S. Lady—Bolus is worth two hundred thousand dollars.

MRS. S. Well—Choppin is more than suspected of having poisoned his first wife.

DOCT. S. He is worth three hundred thousand dollars.

MRS. S. Didn't Cinders inveigle his friend Brevity into a bye-street, so that the bully, Jackson, could cane him almost to death without fear of detection?

DOCT. S. He did, lady: but Cinders writes poetry, and is worth half a million.

MRS. S. Then there was John Squab: didn't he forge his brother's indorsement?

DOCT. S. Oh, lord! Squab is worth a million.

MRS. S. Why, then, should poor Thickset, who overdrew his bank-account for eleven hundred dollars, be proscribed?

DOCT. S. Because he is not worth a cent. We make this grand distinction, lady. A man may play the rogue with impunity so long as he carries a full purse, covers his wife with diamonds, and lives up to the fashionable standard of extravagance. But let him lose the price of his iniquity—let his purse run short,—and our New-York aristocracy are superb in denouncing him.

MRS. SP. Doctor, you must give a lecture on

Fashion at the Tabernacle. Your sentiments would tell famously with an audience. They would make a great hit in a theatre.

DOCT. S. Just what I was thinking, lady: only, instead of a lecture, I will write a comedy, and take the principal character myself. How would it read in the bills? Doctor Stubbs will make his first appearance on any stage in the new play written by himself, entitled "Every Tub on its own Bottom." My life on't, 'twould draw a great house the first night: for the rest, least said soonest mended.—Who is this young gentleman? Is this the Count de Bressi?

MRS. SP. He looks as if he might be a Count, doesn't he, doctor? That's my Alfred, just returned from the grand tour.

DOCT. S. Somewhat resembling a grand Turk. You are welcome home, my dear boy; but, Alfred—excuse the freedom of an old friend: you owe the barber a shilling.

MRS. SP. Doctor, that's all the fashion: isn't it, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in St. Petersburg, I saw a

review of the Imperial horse-guards; and, as to hair, really, 'pon my honour——

DOCT. S. Yes; I have often heard of that; it is a strife between the men's lips and the horses' tails, which shall show the longest brush; and by the last accounts, the horses had the best of it. But when an American carries the joke to such a length that he cannot take a dose of calomel without swallowing a drachm of his own hair; why, as the young gentleman says, really, 'pon my honour,——What music is that?

MRS. S. Oh, that's the procession of the Washington Monument Association. We must see it, by all means. Doctor, will you hand Mrs. Spooner to the front parlour?

DOCT. S. With the greatest pleasure, lady. In my opinion, all we shall ever see of this monument is its processions. And I will add, if George Washington needs a monument to his memory, what will become of the poor devils who signed the Declaration of Independence? Washington's appropriate monument is erected already; it is the republican institutions of his country. Gran-

ite and marble will decay; but that which creates and sustains successive generations of freemen, is immortal!

Exeunt.

SCENE III.

Erskine's Library.

Enter ERSKINE and CLARA.

ERSK. I sent for you, my child, to speak of your friend, and my friend, Frederick Somerville. He has made formal proposals to me; and he is a man, whom in every respect I might desire for a son-in-law. You are confused, Clara! Surely, I do not misjudge your feelings toward him?

CLARA. No, sir;— I,——

ERSK. I have long observed and tacitly sanctioned his attentions. I have watched him; I have studied him; I have investigated his entire

character. For, if I am to part with you, my child, it surely behooves me to know *to whom* I transfer my life's treasure.

CLARA. Dear father! we are not to part?

ERSK. No, not entirely; not entirely part. We will not do that until one of us follows *her* who awaits our coming; and that is but parting—to meet again. But, after a father has been father and mother—nay, nurse, instructor, companion—to his child almost from the day her childhood dawned; the ties between them are so many, and the bond of union is so strong—they do part when she bestows herself on one who is not her father.

CLARA. Papa, you have always been so good, so kind, so dear to me!

ERSK. True, true, true; and from this you may judge how I could endure to see you receive *unkindness* from another; from one who will have taken my place in your heart; from one who could forbid my interference to protect you from wrong.

CLARA. Who could thus treat me?

ERSK. I think that Frederick would not. I think that his own estimable qualities would lead

him to be kind, considerate, indulgent; almost as much so as I am. And therefore it is, that, since you must be another's, I have little hesitation in approving your choice.

CLARA. But, papa,—I do not know,——

ERSK. *What*, my daughter?

CLARA. I—at least——perhaps I had better not marry him, after all.

ERSK. Have you changed your mind, Clara?

CLARA. Oh, no—that is——

ERSK. Speak frankly: have you any reason to doubt the sincerity of Frederick's affection?

CLARA. No sir; none in the world.

ERSK. Ha, you answer that question readily and distinctly. Do you, then, doubt your own affection for him?

CLARA. Father! how strangely you catechise me!

ERSK. It is as I feared! Clara, you have already descended to equivocation. I leave you to consider how far that cause is a good one, which, in its first development, leads to such a result.

CLARA. Now, father, you are angry with me.

ERSK. My dear daughter, the air you breathe, the very dust you tread upon, is precious to me. Can I see you jeopard your happiness, and retain my self-possession? Nay, can I see this first step of estrangement from me; this first indication of coldness in a heart that, until now, has loved as I have—and *not* feel the incipient throbs of a life-long agony?

CLARA. Father! father! you will break my heart.

ERSK. I pray God that you do not inflict that fate upon me! Clara, you need no longer withhold the truth which I have been struggling to disbelieve. Do you think my eye was not on you at the ball, last night? Your fancy—I will not say your love—is ensnared by that foreigner, that reckless adventurer as I doubt not, who styles himself a Count.

CLARA. Papa, he is a real Count.

ERSK. Indeed!

CLARA. He has letters from the first people on the continent. Besides, his manners prove his birth.

ERSK. Have you any distinct idea what value smooth manners and a title bear in the scale of domestic happiness?

CLARA. Oh, papa! he is so amiable! so accomplished!

ERSK. Were he all that your fancy pictures him; and, what is far more important, were he an honest man; there is still that which should place him as far from your regard as he is from my respect.

CLARA. What is that?

ERSK. He is a foreigner.

CLARA. Surely, he cannot help the accident of his birth.

ERSK. Nor do I hold him responsible for it; but, being a foreigner, he is unfitted to be your companion. His habits, taste, education, opinions, differ radically and utterly from yours. I tell you, my child, when an American woman marries a foreign aristocrat, she weds herself to incongruity, to uncongeniality, to misery that never terminates short of the grave. Yet, your sex here, would disregard the dictates of nature and education;

you would spurn those whom heaven has ordained to be your husbands; and you would literally throw yourselves into the arms of these adventurers, whose very touch is contamination.

CLARA. Father, you are denouncing a gentleman who has done you no wrong, and who may never remember to call upon me.

ERSK. Did you give him permission to call?

CLARA. Yes, father, I did.

ERSK. Without consulting my wishes, or Frederick's?

CLARA. I am not bound to consult Mr. Somerville about every thing.

ERSK. Indeed, you are not. That remark shows that you are not likely to consult him at all. —Clara, this interview must terminate as interview between us has never terminated before. I hope a little reflection may bring you to a better mind. But of one thing be assured: my sanction of that man's visits to my house, my consent to his usurping Frederick's place in your regard, shall never be granted. Leave me now; and try to persuade yourself that your father cares more for your hap-

piness, and knows better how to promote it, than any other person in the world.

Exit CLARA.

Is this a visitation of my evil genius, to punish a delinquency of my youth? A fear of *some* calamity at times, hangs over me, with the power of an independent curse. Can it be, that my West Indian crime remains unexpiated? Is the youth of nineteen, caught in the toils of a crafty Creole, to atone for his folly by the sacrifice of his domestic peace, after so many years have rolled by? It cannot be. Yet, that woman is alive, and *is here!* Nay, she has been here for a twelvemonth, although I never recognised her until last evening. This Mrs. Rodney is no other than the instigator and partner of my crime. She is changed beyond all compass of belief; yet she is not the less Adelaide Mowbray. Why is she here? Is it accident? Is it caprice? Has she a purpose to execute?—Strange! I stand here in my own house a free man; yet, such is the power of a train of suggestive thoughts, I have almost the feelings of a culprit.—Now, Stephen?

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. This note, sir.

Exit SERVANT.

ERSK. A stranger's hand : a lady's hand : and yet, too bold for a lady. I'll be bound, 'tis not a challenge, yet the sudden appearance of this little note gives me an indefinable uneasiness.—Ha ! can it be from *her* ? I never saw her writing ; nay, now I bethink me, at that time she could neither read nor write. Yet, I would be sworn, when educated—and she now is educated—she would accomplish just this bold, elegant, reckless hand.

(reads.) “ *An old friend, who once met you in the West Indies, and again met you last evening at her own house, would renew her acquaintance. She will be at home and alone at four o'clock.*”

Adelaide.”

'Tis even so ! But what does it portend ? Evil, beyond a peradventure. Were it not better to dis-

regard this? To do so, might raise a storm that temporising can avert. I will see her and learn her purpose. Be it what it may, I fear it not.

Exit.

END OF ACT I.

ACT SECOND.

SCENE I.

Mrs. Rodney's.

Enter MRS. RODNEY, *reading a note.*

MRS. R. It could not be more brief: yet brevity, in such a case, may indicate anything but coldness.

"Mr. Erskine will wait upon Mrs. Rodney at four o'clock."

Not a superfluous word. What a simpleton I am! I have studied this note for half an hour to find some hidden meaning in its directness, when the interview which will solve all doubts is close at hand.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. Mr. Erskine, madam.

MRS. R. Yes—very well. If any one else calls, I am engaged.

Exit SERVANT.

The crisis of my fate—long sought, long deferred—has come at last. Let me be true to my own hopes, how much soever I may falsify a chapter of my own history.

Enter ERSKINE.

ERSK. I am here, madam, in obedience to a summons totally unexpected, but which I could not disregard. I should be wanting in candour, did I not confess my recent discovery of your identity; yet you are wonderfully changed.

MRS. R. For the better, I hope?

ERSK. Certainly, in all that cultivation may accomplish, immensely for the better. The mature, educated woman so differs from the wild and wayward girl, that personal recognition is here but a conventional term; it means, simply, the assent of the understanding to an undeniable truth. I cannot doubt that which, nevertheless, I cannot realize.

MRS. R. At least, then, meet me as a friend, even if you forget all of the past but the fact that we have met before.

she offers her hand.

ERSK. As we have both done wrong, if not both suffered wrong, it is meet to meet so.—But

he takes her hand.

to meet as friends is equivocal and perhaps dangerous to us both. Why have you come to America? And why remain here so long unknown, now to avow yourself?

MRS. R. Charles—nay! if that name, in that tone, be offensive—Mr. Erskine, the answer to these questions involves a recital of the events, the trials, perchance the sorrows of a quarter of a century. There remains this, however, in common between us, and it embodies a volume in a line:—I have achieved my own fortune.

ERSK. This is stranger than a dream!

MRS. R. As truth is ever stranger than fiction.

Yet, why is it strange? There is no *impossible* to a fixed purpose and an unconquerable will.

ERSK. These are the masculine characteristics of greatness.

MRS. R. Yet these dwell in many a woman's heart, though she may not suspect their existence until necessity or oppression call them forth.

ERSK. Was such your lot?

MRS. R. Perhaps! I desired education and obtained it. I longed for a position in society; I married, and it was mine. Early a widow with an ample fortune, there is little of European high life that I have not known: there is little to be learned from travel and observation, that travel and observation have not taught me. Yet, I am but the West Indian girl thirty years removed from herself.

ERSK. Retrospectively, the time is short, but the *remove* is infinite. I recognise you less than ever.

MRS. R. (*showing a child's coral and bells*). Do you recognise this? Do you remember the little hand, marked with a strawberry?

ERSK. Adelaide!—heaven help me!—*where is he?*

MRS. R. Where did you last see him?

ERSK. At the foot of the orange-tree.

MRS. R. Perchance, he is there still,—but *not* as you saw him, playing with this bauble. He looked, he sighed, he pined long for one who was long absent: his nurse could not comfort him, for she was comfortless: he faded from life as gently as an infant sinks to sleep: and his parting breath lisped the only name he had learned to pronounce. These hands placed him in the cold earth,—judge whether this tongue cursed the father who had abandoned him.

ERSK. This passes all I had imagined. If I have wronged you, Adelaide, forgive me: but do not inflict on me the pain of listening to the past.

MRS. R. If the recital of these events so impresses you, consider the effect of the events themselves on me. But I stand not here as your accuser. It is enough that you admit the wrong, if you consent to the appropriate reparation.

ERSK. Reparation, Adelaide?

MRS. R. Reparation, Charles!

ERSK. I do not understand you.

MRS. R. The word is a plain one, and its meaning is obvious—if you *choose* to understand it.

ERSK. I would not talk absurdly nor incoherently: but, if I am convinced of your identity, I begin to doubt my own. And this word, which you pronounce so significantly and deem so intelligible, is to me wholly mysterious. You have something to request—to demand, it would seem. Briefly and in plain language, what would you have me do?

MRS. R. Marry me.

ERSK. I—Marry!—Have you taken leave of your senses?

MRS. R. No, Charles; nor am I suggesting what is beyond reason or propriety. You promised me marriage when I was obscure, ignorant, and in poverty: now, I am your equal and demand it.

ERSK. Is this a form of wooing that you learned in European high life?

MRS. R. I learned it some thirty years ago in the West Indies, from a youth who told me that my voice was sweeter and my form more lovely than those of his own clime: and who, when I had

sacrificed all to him, left me to mourn over my solitude and my shame.

ERSK. Madam, when you relate your story to third persons—should you ever find occasion to do so—you may embellish it with fiction and adapt it to theatrical effect. But when you call to *my* remembrance incidents we should both do well to forget, it is better to speak of them truly. Otherwise, you lead me to suspect that what you attribute to me is, with more justice, chargeable to a successor.

MRS. S. Dare you insinuate that?

ERSK. I dare; but I do not. I merely show you the consequence of your own misrepresentation. I never promised you marriage; nor, until now, did you ever demand it. When a boy of nineteen, sojourning among strangers and free from those restraints without which no young man is safe, I became the victim of your artifice. Subsequently, reflecting on the coolness of your plan to ensnare me; and the recklessness of your ingenuity to hold me ensnared, I took the only honest course that remained. I escaped: I fled: I aban-

doned you, if you choose so to term it—without a farewell, but not without the means of livelihood in your station. There are cases, where a greater maturity and a deeper subtlety of character give woman a temporary ascendancy over the youth of my sex: and this was our relative position thirty years ago. I have learned something in the interim. Now, I am no one's dupe.

MRS. R. In a word, then, you refuse me?

ERSK. Unequivocally. Peremptorily.

MRS. R. Yet pause!—Forget that I have demanded this. Forget all past and present wrong. Forget and forgive. Love me as you once loved me. I entreat, I implore you, Charles, do not refuse me!

ERSK. I will neither temporise nor deceive you. It is simply impossible to listen to such a proposal.—Rise, for shame!

MRS. R. Charles—I warn you!—this refusal shall cost you more than your life!

ERSK. Wronging no one, and in charity with all—even with you—I smile at a threat from one who cannot wage her quarrel without avowing her

dishonour; and who, by that procedure, must discredit herself where credit alone can sustain her. Did I not pity, I would defy you: as it is, I pardon and bid you adieu.

Exit ERSKINE.

MRS. R. Refused! humbled! scorned!—One moment of grief that my woman's nature cannot repress:

(rings.)

—and now, for a revenge at which man's heart may quail!

Enter SERVANT.

I am at home to the Count de Bressi.

Exit SERVANT.

The dearest wish of my heart is blasted; and, with it, perish all the compunction my heart ever owned! Erskine may weep at the remembrance of the child beneath the orange-tree; but he will shed tears of blood when he comes to know—as, at the right time, I will make him know—that the child is alive, is a man, is the chosen and cherished

instrument of my vengeance. I deceived Erskine on this point, hoping to secure him in a moment of sympathy: there I failed. I deceived my son on the same point, lest he should falter at the final step.—Let that step be taken, and Erskine shall know with what safety an injured woman may be defied!

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

CHAS. I give you joy, mother, if you have succeeded with your love, as I have with mine:—but no! you have failed?

MRS. R. Utterly: hopelessly: of that, hereafter. How have you prospered?

CHAS. To my heart's content. Informed by you that Erskine would be here, I called on Clara; found her alone; had a sentimental tête-à-tête; declared my adoration; and received all the encouragement I dared hope for.

MRS. R. Ha! ha! ha!

CHAS. Mother! what is the matter?

MRS. R. I am thinking!

CHAS. That laugh was unearthly.

MRS. R. Never mind it. I am glad you have secured the daughter: the father is my victim.

CHAS. But—what do you propose?

MRS. R. Nothing now; nothing until you are married.

CHAS. That may take time. Erskine will oppose me, to a certainty. Clara told me so; and designated the hours when he is usually away from home. So, you see, the thing is on a clandestine footing already.

MRS. R. That's a felicitous thought! A clandestine footing is one that will bear urging and may be expedited by one's friends. We will consider this. But, if it takes time, I can wait. I have learned to wait. I have waited thirty years. Another year, more or less, is of little moment.

CHAS. You don't mean to kill the man, mother? Yet, on my soul, you seem equal to such a deed.

MRS. R. Kill him! Allow him to escape me with a few pangs of dissolution? Suffer him to expiate my life of bitterness by a groan or two?—No! a dearer fate than that is in store for him.

CHAS. Mother—you are deceiving me!

MRS. R. I!—How?

CHAS. My mere marriage is not such a vengeance as you propose.

MRS. R. Are you a Count? Have you the title you assume?

CHAS. No; neither am I altogether a vagabond: and if I obtain Clara under false pretences as to my position, I shall not deceive her as to my affection. I love her with a passion that, I confess, I do not understand: but the thing farthest from possibility is that I should ever treat her unkindly.

MRS. R. (*Aside.*) How shrewd is the instinct of the heart! I have almost betrayed myself!—Charles, you are deceiving yourself. To a man of Erskine's temperament and station, such a deception would be the very bitterest punishment; and the more so, because it would be co-existent with his life. Still, in the excitement of my own disappointment, I *have* exaggerated its intensity. You must consider, Charles, this is my only method of retaliation, and I would fain believe it greater than it is.—Where are you invited this evening?

CHAS. To dine with Mrs. Jenkins; who, between ourselves, is *very* friendly, and, to my judgment, rather French in her morals. And if her skill as a match-maker does not belie her reputation, her assistance just now, which she readily promises, will be of great use. Besides, I flatter myself that she has her own reasons for wishing me success as a husband.

MRS. R. As how?

CHAS. Umph! She could then, according to the European rule, better rely on me as a lover.

MRS. R. You forget, Charles, that you are now in the moral atmosphere of New-York.

CHAS. Oh, as to that, your fashionable women are much the same all the world over. My acquaintance with the people here is brief; but I already find the same fondness for display, the same longing for admiration, the same ambition for conquest, as one finds on the Continent; and, if the passion for intrigue, which is twin-sister to the rest, is far behind the rest in the giddy race of fashion, all I can say is, I am greatly deceived. As to the young women of the same class, who

seem to have no thought and no object in life but a brilliant match—egad! they are so fascinated by my title, that, were polygamy allowed, I could not only make my own selection, but have as many wives as King Solomon.

MRS. R. Nevertheless, I may count on your constancy to Clara, simply because she will be the richest heiress of the city.

CHAS. Mother, you do me no more than justice. I am a model of fidelity to—the main chance.

Exeunt.

SCENE II.

Union Place.

Enter ERSKINE.

ERSK. How astounding is the apparition of this woman! She has risen, as from the grave; and, with a sort of supernatural energy, she summons me to a fate to which my own grave were preferable.—Marriage with her!

Enter FREDERICK SOMERVILLE.

FREDERICK! you pass an old friend like a new foe.
What's the matter?

FRED. Mr. Erskine! is it possible!

ERSK. Possible, my dear boy? Very possible indeed.

FRED. Have you been recently at home, sir?

ERSK. Not for an hour, perhaps.

FRED. Then this is still more incomprehensible.

ERSK. I find it so. Will you explain?

FRED. I beg your pardon, sir: but you take this very coolly.

ERSK. Nay, Frederick, if you have anything serious to say, you must express yourself intelligibly.

FRED. Then, sir, I think it right to inform you that I just now called at your house, and was refused admittance.

ERSK. This is some mistake.

FRED. Not on my part, sir. Stephen himself told me Clara was engaged.

ERSK. I do not know, I confess, how she should be engaged at this hour; but, if it did so happen, there is nothing very serious about it. Come, go with me. I'll warrant we find her at leisure.

FRED. But, sir,—after walking a short distance, and reflecting on a thing so unexpected, I returned, saw the door opened, and the Count de—Bressi, I think they call him,—

ERSK. Ha!

FRED. I say, sir, the Count de Bressi, followed to the door by Clara herself, came out of your house.

ERSK. I have been in a feverish dream throughout the day; but this incident, like the burst of a trumpet, wakes me to affirmative action. Come with me: I say *you must*! She followed him to the door, did she? Would I had met him there! But no! were I to grapple him in this mood—fool that I am! Forgive me, Frederick. This villain should not have the power to move me thus. Come, I am calmer now. But I feel a load on my heart that crushes it down with a mountain's weight. Frederick, I will go home with you. I will not

trust myself to see Clara now. I will defer that until the morning. Come.

Exeunt.

SCENE III.

Mrs. Jenkins's.

Enter MRS. JENKINS, *Servant following.*

MRS. J. The perfection of ill-manners! to send me a regret, just as my dinner is ready to be served. Violent head-ache, indeed! This head-ache is the most incomprehensible of all domestic ailings. A lady in want of an excuse is never in want of a head-ache. Take this to Mrs. Popkins immediately.

Exit SERVANT.

I will accept no such regret. My number is fourteen; and I must dine thirteen because, at this hour, when it would be ridiculous to send for any one else, Mrs. Popkins must have a head-ache.

I wouldn't dine thirteen to save Mrs. Popkins from Purgatory—that's flat. Let me see: a quarter to six: and of all my company invited at five precisely, not a soul yet in sight. Really, this fashion of coming at any time to a dinner appointed at a fixed time, has its inconveniences. Mercy on me! is that coach to stop at my door?

(*rings.*)

Three trunks behind; two in front; the top covered with band-boxes; and the inside filled with bird-cages.

Enter SERVANT.

William, what is that coach doing there?

SERV. I think, madam, it is a visiter from the country.

MRS. J. Good lord! and just as my company will be arriving. Run, William: tell them I am not at home: I am out of town:—Stay, it is too late! As I hope to be saved, there steps out my maiden aunt, Tabitha, looking like a fright as usual. See the wretch! she stops to bully the driver about his fare. Go, William; pay the man whatever he

asks ; and get that woman with her trumpery luggage into the house and up stairs in the least possible time.

Exit SERVANT.

Such an exhibition as that before a dress-dinner company, and the Count de Bressi of the party ! Confound the hag ! I could cry for vexation. But it won't do to quarrel with the old fool. She is worth a hundred thousand, at the least, and I am almost certain to be down for it in the Will. I must get her out of sight and keep her out of sight for to-day at any rate. I hope she has such a head-ache that she can't see out of her eyes.

Enter TABITHA with a band-box and a parrot-cage.

My dear aunt ! how happy I am to see you ! Such an unexpected pleasure.

TABIT. I always like to surprise you, Susan : it's my way, you know. But, my dear ! I have been in such a flurry ! Boats, racing ; ladies, screaming ; gentlemen, cheering ; captains, swear-

ing; boilers, bursting: I am more dead than alive.

MRS. J. Poor dear aunt! you must go to your room immediately.

(rings.)

You have a dreadful head-ache, of course. These steamboat captains ought to be indicted.

Enter SERVANT.

Take this band-box and cage to Miss Pippin's room: and tell Jane to arrange the bath.

Exit SERVANT.

A bath and a good sleep will perhaps carry this off.

TABIT. My dear Susan, you mean all this for kindness; but, child! I want time to breathe. I am much better since I am clear of that abominable boat. Indeed, I am more hungry than anything else. I *hope* you haven't dined?

MRS. J. It's long past my dinner-hour; but that's of no consequence. I'll send anything you would like to your room.

TABIT. You are very kind ; but indeed, Susan, I prefer to remain here.

MRS. J. Just as you please, of course. But if your digestion gets disturbed, and you should have one of those dreadful head-aches—

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. Doctor Stubbs, madam.

Exit SERVANT.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) I thought so! they are coming!—Now, my dear aunt, you'll have a fit of sickness ; I'm sure of it.

TABIT. Well, well, if you insist upon it—stay ; I have lost my glove.

MRS. J. I'll find it when I come back.

TABIT. But there's a ring and a sixpence in it.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) The devil take the glove !

TABIT. Ah, here it is.

Enter DOCTOR STUBBS.

DOCT. S. Lady Jenkins, ten thousand apologies for being so late : but we doctors cannot command the hours.

MRS. J. First door after the turn of the stairs : you know the room ?—No apology is needed, doctor.—I'll go with you.

TABIT. What a nice-looking man ! who is it ?

MRS. J. Only the doctor. Come.

DOCT. S. Madam, your most obedient.—A friend from the country ?

MRS. J. Eh—yes : my aunt. She is not very well.

DOCT. S. The more reason, lady, for presenting her to the doctor.

MRS. J. Oh, Lucifer !—My aunt, Miss Pip-pin : Doctor Stubbs.

TABIT. The great modern benefactor, who discovered the use of the chloroform ? Sir, the whole world is ringing with your praise.

DOCT. S. Lady, I am the whole world's very humble servant. Allow me. Not very well, lady Jenkins ? This lady is the picture of health : and fresh from the country, no doubt ; for she wears one of those sensible hats that are hat, parasol and umbrella all in one.

TABIT. A practical man, doctor, is my admira-

tion. The city fashion of hats is shocking:-- stuck on the crown of one's head, to say nothing of looks, how they expose the complexion!

DOCT. S. Nevertheless, lady, pray remove your hat: these rooms are warm; and those lovely ringlets should never be hid.

TABIT. Oh, doctor! I do not believe my hair is fit to be seen: but you are so polite.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) Doctor, if you keep her talking here, I shall die!

DOCT. S. (*Aside.*) Hush! she's a real study.-- I knew it. Ah, lady, those natural curls put our city hair-dressers to the blush. You are just from Communipaw?

TABIT. From Tarrytown, doctor.

DOCT. S. A beautiful spot, lady, provided one does not *tarry* there too long.

TABIT. True, doctor: I begin to tire of living in the country. The beaux are so stupid.

DOCT. S. Yes: young men seem to be born without brains now-a-days.

TABIT. I don't mean the very young men, doctor: but the substantial men: the men of a certain

age; men whom one might hope to depend upon: even they are stupid in the country.

DOCT. S. Lady, I cannot answer for the good or bad qualities of the country bachelors; but I admire your discrimination between youth and manhood. And the rule holds good with your own sex. What a treasure does a solid middle-aged man possess, who can call his own the thousand nameless charms of a woman so far matured, that the poetry of her passion is tempered by the divinity of her judgment.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) Doctor! for heaven's sake!

TABIT. (*Aside.*) The dear, delicious man!—I see, doctor, you have felt the tender passion.

DOCT. S. Never, lady. Never, upon my sacred honour!—At least, never, but for that charming creature whom my imagination has often pictured, but whom my eyes never yet beheld.

TABIT. Doctor—your arm!—I am so agitated!

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) Get her out of the way, or I shall go mad!

the DOCTOR and TABITHA retire up.

This woman will be the death of me!

Enter MRS. SPOONEY *and* ALFRED.

My dear Mrs. Spooney, I had almost given you up. Do you know it's past six o'clock?

MRS. S. My dear, do *you* know that people abroad never think of being punctual?—Do they, Alfred?

ALF. When I was in Algiers, I dined with the Bey of Tunis; and, as to punctuality, really, 'pon my honour—

Enter MISS LARKINS.

MISS L. My dear Mrs. Jenkins, I am sure you will pardon my coming so late. I ordered the carriage at five, but the coachman's livery, which has been three times at the tailor's to be altered, never came home till six.

MRS. J. You are quite in good time, my dear, compared to the rest. My dinner will be burned to a cinder, and we shall have but few to eat it, at that.

ALF. Miss Larkins, may I presume to touch the tip of your finger? When I was in Cairo, I

went to a dance of the Almehs; and, as to fingers, really, 'pon my honour—

Enter MRS. SPRIGGINS.

MRS. S. Not a word, Mrs. Jenkins! not one word! I was dressed and ready an hour ago; when, who should rush into my house but one of those public nuisances, a country cousin? She kept me on one foot listening to an everlasting story about the racing of steamboats, until I couldn't help wishing the boiler had burst, and blown her and all the company to the—hem!

TABIT. (*coming forward.*) You are severe, madam, on country cousins.

MRS. S. La!—I beg your pardon, madam. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) I have no alternative!—Ladies, my aunt, Miss Pippin.

TABIT. (*looking at Alfred.*) Is that a man, or an ape?

ALF. Really, 'pon my honour——

TABIT. It talks, though!

MRS. S. You must excuse me, Mrs. Pippin.

TABIT. Miss Pippin, if you please.

MRS. S. I beg your pardon, Miss Pippin. But in speaking of country cousins, I intended no reference to ladies at our time of life.

TABIT. Our time of life, indeed! Upon my word, you are mending the matter at a great rate, Mrs. Spriggy.

MRS. S. Spriggins, my dear.

TABIT. Spriggins, then: it's all one: either name is sufficiently ridiculous. As to time of life, I am sure you are old enough to be my mother. And although, by one of the accidents that regulate those things, I am aunt to Mrs. Jenkins, I can yet set my cap, madam, as jauntily as any widow of my acquaintance.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. The Count de Bressi, madam.

MRS. J. Let the dinner be served immediately.

Exit SERVANT.

Aunt! for mercy's sake;—this is a nobleman.

TABIT. What! a real nobleman?

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

What a beautiful man !

CHAS. Mrs. Jenkins, I am happy to see you looking so well this evening. Mrs. Spooner, I believe. Ah, (*to Miss Larkins*) my partner in the Polka.

MRS. J. Doctor Stubbs, Count: a great favourite with the ladies: unrivalled in a sick chamber: the discoverer of the chloroform: a physician who can cure everything but the heart-ache and the head-ache.

DOCT. S. Count, I appreciate the honour our lady hostess confers on me by this introduction: but her compliments are unanswerable. You know the lady, Count? She is the sun of our social system: her radiance imparts life and light to the meanest satellite of her train: and we can no more fly from her attraction, than the planets can abandon their orbits.

ALF. Really, 'pon my honour——

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. (*to Mrs. J.*) Dinner is served, madam.

Exit SERVANT.

MRS. J. My company has not all arrived: but as our chief guest is here, we will not wait for them.

she takes CHAS. RODNEY's arm.

Doctor, will you hand in Mrs. Spooney?

Excunt, ceremoniously: TABITHA
catching the Doctor's other arm.

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT THIRD.

SCENE I.

Erskine's Library.

ERSKINE *discovered sitting at a table. A servant in attendance.*

ERSK. Stephen, take these letters to the post: and say to Miss Erskine that I am at leisure.

Exit SERVANT.

I have postponed this interview with Clara until this morning, that I might conduct my share in it with moderation: yet even now, I dread it.

Enter CLARA.

CLARA. Papa, you passed the whole evening in your own room; you kissed me no good night; and this morning you have breakfasted alone. You are ill, or angry.

ERSK. I am both, my child, and I think that, without extraordinary sagacity, you might guess the cause of the one, and the subject of the other.

CLARA. Dear father! you cannot be angry with me?

ERSK. I dare not say I cannot be, Clara: I may perhaps say I am not. But we may dismiss conjectures when we have to do with facts. You instructed Stephen, yesterday afternoon, to say you were engaged if *any* one called: and your engagement consisted in entertaining a person, whose visits you know I disapprove, and had resolved to forbid.

CLARA. He called of his own accord, sir; and was shown into the parlour. I could not send him out.

ERSK. Neither, methinks, need you have followed him out—accompanied him to the very door: an act of familiarity as indelicate as it was ill-bred. Besides, how unworthy of yourself, how unjust to me, to deny all other visiters, that your interview with this person might be private.

CLARA. Father, you speak of the Count in a

depreciating tone—just as if he were an ordinary man.

ERSK. In what is he extraordinary?

CLARA. In manners, conversation, universal accomplishments. I have never before seen so charming a gentleman.

ERSK. Umph! and what do you expect, as the issue of this freak?

CLARA. I admire the Count, beyond every thing.

ERSK. Am I to understand that you would marry him?

CLARA. I am not certain that he would marry me.

ERSK. I can resolve that doubt. He is cunning enough to see the advantage of such an alliance. He will certainly propose, and I shall certainly refuse him.

CLARA. But, father—am I not to be consulted?

ERSK. Your true happiness is to be consulted—not your capricious folly. In violation of a solemn compact—and so suddenly that I cannot yet realize it—you have discarded a tried, worthy, ami-

able friend: and, with the same ill-omened precipitancy, you have chosen a successor, destitute, so far as you can know, of every quality that should recommend him even to your thoughts. Inconceivable as it seems, you are ready to confide to the guardianship of this stranger your large, loving heart; your sum of earthly enjoyment; your welfare here and hereafter. I could not calmly see this mad hastiness of self-sacrifice in any one: how can I bear it in my only child?

CLARA. Father, how can you know better than I do, what I like?

ERSK. Because I know your disposition and your nature better than you do. The instinct of a mother more resembles a superintending Providence than any other faculty vouchsafed to frail humanity; and I am to you father and mother both.

CLARA. It is the European custom for parents to choose their daughters' husbands.

ERSK. I do not choose a husband for you: I seek, only, to oppose a rash choice of your own. Clara, I see it is vain to reason; I cannot persuade;

I would not command; let me entreat. Clara! my own Clara! the happiness of our whole lives is at stake. Do not persist in this fatal purpose!

CLARA. My dear father, you would forbear, if you knew how you distress me. Surely, I can judge somewhat for myself.

ERSK. You may judge those who resemble yourself, for you have but to study your own heart to know theirs. But an artful, calculating man, is as far beyond your judgment as Satan was beyond Eve's in the garden of Eden.

CLARA. This is the extremity of injustice! You assume everything unfavourable to the Count; and you rate me as a child who must be blindly led by you to safety, or by him to ruin. I am but a puppet, in either case.

ERSK. Clara, a feeling of estrangement and hostility has arisen between us,——us, whose life, hitherto, has been one scene of confidence and love. A villain has brought this calamity upon us. A fellow with no more truth in his pretensions than honour in his soul, or integrity in his purpose. A foreign impostor, who protests his affection for you

while he looks only at the fortune of your father. A thief, who has broken into my heart, and robbed me of all it held dearest. Since you disregard my arguments, my desire, my entreaty—know this: if that scoundrel, after due warning, again crosses my threshold, I will horsewhip him as long as I can swing my arm.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. The Count de Bressi, Miss Erskine, is in the drawing-room.

CLARA. Is it possible! This is some mistake.—Stephen, I am engaged.

ERSK. No. Not engaged. Ask him if he will oblige *me* by seeing us here.

Exit SERVANT.

CLARA. Father! what do you intend to do?

ERSK. What is right. What the emergency calls for. What this opportunity invites. Men who stand in the relation to each other that he and I do, must come to an explanation.

CLARA. I hope no violence may be used.

ERSK. Clara, I know what I owe to myself in dealing with one under my own roof. For the rest, his conduct will be the rule of mine.

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

I have not, as yet, the pleasure of knowing you, sir; but it is the custom of fathers in this country to desire the acquaintance of those whom their children know: for which reason, I took the liberty of inviting you into my own apartment.

CHAS. You do me great honour, and I beg to assure you that I appreciate it. I was so fortunate as to meet your daughter at Mrs. Rodney's ball, and I called to-day in the hope of being permitted to continue the acquaintance.

ERSK. Do I understand, that this is your first visit at my house?

CHAS. Eh—I called for a moment last evening—but—

ERSK. But as I was not at home, you have called again to-day?

CHAS. Precisely so.

ERSK. (*Aside.*) Equivocating scoundrel!—I am not far wrong, then, in considering this visit intended for myself?

CHAS. I am very happy in the opportunity to know you, and shall be flattered to have you so interpret it.

ERSK. Under these circumstances, you will, perhaps, apprise me of your motive in seeking my acquaintance?

CHAS. Really, sir—you are so direct—I—in short, being a stranger, and highly gratified by the kind hospitalities I, as a stranger, have received in America, I desire to number among my friends a man so estimable and so noted as Mr. Erskine.

ERSK. Your terms are very obliging. We Americans are a blunt people. We seldom part with our friendship except for an equivalent. May I venture to inquire who you are?

CHAS. A Bavarian nobleman, whose position at home vouches for his character abroad.

ERSK. Any man's position at home vouches for his character abroad: the question here is, what is your position at home?

CHAS. My letters establish that.

ERSK. Ah, now we reach a point, where we might have commenced. Have you those letters at hand?

CHAS. Letters of introduction, Mr. Erskine, at least in my experience, are not used as circulars. They are addressed to individuals, and mine have been delivered as addressed. Fortunately, however, one of my certificates of character is in my pocket. It is addressed to Mr. Jobson, who is absent from town. Will you examine it?—Your father, Miss Erskine, is very eccentric.

CLARA. He is excited—as I am. Pray, be temperate. It is so unfortunate that you called this morning.

CHAS. Shall I see you to-day at Mrs. Jenkins's?

CLARA. If possible, yes.

ERSK. Mr. de Bressi—(*looking again at the letter*)—ah, I beg pardon; *Count* de Bressi; I am sorry to make an unpleasant remark, but this letter is forged.

CHAS. Sir!

ERSK. This letter is a forgery.

CHAS. By heaven, sir!—

CLARA. Father!—Count!—

ERSK. Silence, Clara! And you, sir; mark me. By a fortunate chance—rather let me say by the foreordering of a kind Providence—I have been for years in correspondence with the gentleman whose name is subscribed to this letter. He sailed from Liverpool for India in August last, and I have this day received intelligence of his death on ship-board,

(ERSKINE *here takes an open letter from his table,*)

on the third day of September—two months preceding the date here affixed.—Quit my house without a word: and quit the town at your earliest convenience. If you remain here another week, on my honour I will expose you.

CHAS. Mr. Erskine!

ERSK. I am not a man to be trifled with. Go! before a moment of reflection incites me to some act of violence. You have disturbed the happiness of my family: you have thwarted the purpose of my heart: you have ruffled the placidity and sullied

the sweetness of *her* character.—Begone! If you give me an opportunity to repeat that word, “I will shake your bones out of your garments.”

CHAS. Mr. Erskine, this language—here—admits of no reply. If you desire to display your powers as a gladiator, choose, as least, a more fitting occasion. (*Aside.*) Now, mother, we will be conjunctive in revenge!

Exit CHAS. RODNEY.

ERSK. Clara, gratitude—not grief—would become you now.

Exeunt.

SCENE II.

*Mrs. Jenkins's.**Enter MRS. JENKINS and TABITHA.*

MRS. J. Very true, Aunt: but I cannot understand why you should be so interested about the beaux. It is very well for those who are looking out for husbands: but, of course, you have no notion that way.

TABIT. Pray why not I as well as another?

MRS. J. La! what would you do with a husband?

TABIT. Susan! I am astonished at your asking such a question. It is so improper!

MRS. J. Please overlook the impropriety: it certainly was not in my mind. But is not the reputation you have gained by your stoical refusal of a hundred offers, worth preserving?

TABIT. Between ourselves, my dear, I have

gained rather more credit in that quarter than I deserve. I have not told you the story before;—but I was engaged to lawyer Quibble, of Havestraw, for better for worse, for sixteen years. It was for him that I refused so many brilliant offers; and, after all, like a monster of ingratitude, he has married Rebecca Parsley, a little chit of five-and-twenty.

MRS. J. I never dreamed of such a thing.

TABIT. Well, the river-towns are alive with it; and I hope it may not be all over the country before Christmas. But I'll be revenged on Quibble! I'll marry the first man I meet, if it's only to spite him. That little upstart, Miss Parsley! what is she good for, at five-and-twenty! Manners unformed; character unsettled; mind frivolous; and ugly!—oh, sin, what a fright! If I had the making of laws, it should be state-prison for life to any woman who marries before she is forty-five.

MRS. J. Oh, Aunt; that would never do!

TABIT. I'd make it do. Not a minute under five-and-forty. A woman at five-and-forty has learned to discriminate between man and man. She is not to be deceived.

MRS. J. Did not Quibble deceive you?

TABIT. Not at all. Miss Parsley deceived him.

MRS. J. This morning you were complaining of Dr. Stubbs: didn't he deceive you yesterday at dinner?

TABIT. By no means. His fickleness was owing to that pert Mrs. Spooney, who flirted with him until I was positively ashamed of her. And she a widow, too! I think widows have very little to do, to be interfering with other people's prospects: they have had their chance.

MRS. J. Do you think the doctor was in earnest?

TABIT. Child! Don't I know the sex? Haven't I seen men in earnest a hundred times? I tell you, I should have had a proposal in two minutes by the watch, if that woman hadn't interfered.— But I haven't given him up, yet.

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

MRS. J. Thank you, Count, for coming so early.

CHAS. If I come early and stay late, it is

because you entertain in such truly European style.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) Flatterer!—Have you seen Clara?

CHAS. (*Aside.*) Yes. She will be here soon. Mrs. Rodney is waiting for you in the hall. She says, it must be arranged to-day.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) I will see her immediately. You must entertain my Aunt for a few minutes.—But now, Count, if I render you this service, you'll forget me in a month.

CHAS. (*Aside.*) My dear madam—I will sooner forget my existence.

MRS. J. (*Aloud.*) Count, will you excuse me a moment?

Exit MRS. JENKINS.

CHAS. Madam, your most obedient.

TABIT. Sir, you are very kind. A relative, sir, of Mrs. Jenkins. I had the pleasure to meet you yesterday at dinner.

CHAS. Pray, pardon me for not sooner recognizing you. A change of dress does so alter one!

TABIT. Do not recall that dress! It was a travelling costume and not intended to be seen by company. I feared it would quite ruin me with the beaux.

CHAS. (*Aside.*) The beaux! What, is this old fool—hem! Not at all, my dear madam. We gentlemen who have travelled, can tell the diamond at a glance, however common its setting.

TABIT. Oh, sir!

CHAS. Besides, your present toilette makes amends for any previous deficiency. Yours is one of those commanding figures which display bold colouring to the best advantage; and your complexion makes even these roses a foil to your beauty.

TABIT. (*Aside.*) What a love of a man! And a Count, too!—Oh, my *dear* sir, I make no pretension to beauty.

CHAS. The very thing that lends such a grace to your charms. She who is aware of her beauty, spreads over it a veil of conceit and affectation that half disguises its power. But the beauty which is softened by a halo of modest unconsciousness, ah,

that is the loveliness that irradiates Earth to a Paradise and brings stern man to worship in speechless admiration at its shrine.

TABIT. Fascinating being! I perceive you have experienced the tender passion in all its ravishing intensity. How happy the object of your choice!

CHAS. Alas, no! I alone was happy; and that, but for a fleeting moment. *She* was insensible to my devotion.

TABIT. Silly, stupid woman! Pray, describe her.

CHAS. Words are inadequate to the task. But—did I not fear to offend,—I would say, look in yonder mirror, and behold her counterpart.

TABIT. Oh, Count, could I but believe you!

Enter MRS. JENKINS.

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) Fie, Count! I shall be jealous.

TABIT. (*Aside.*) Deuce take you, Susan! He was just coming to a proposal.

CHAS. (*Aside.*) What is a man to do, when

badgered by such a spinster? You shouldn't have left us alone. What says Mrs. Rodney?

MRS. J. (*Aside.*) That everything, now, depends on yourself. You must plead your own cause with Clara and urge an immediate marriage. It is your last opportunity since your quarrel with her father. If she has any final scruples, I will undertake to remove them.

Enter CLARA.

CLARA, my love, you are just in time to relieve me from entertaining the Count. He is desperately dull this morning.—Aunt, about that dress-maker?

MRS. J. *and* TABITHA *retire up.*

CHAS. I feared, Miss Erskine, that I should not see you here.

CLARA. I promised, you know.

CHAS. True; but with such influences against me, I thought you might hesitate even to fulfil a promise: especially, now that I am disgraced.

CLARA. How disgraced?

CHAS. Did not your father put upon me terms that no man of honour can bear?

CLARA. You *must* bear with him. He is hasty, for my sake: you, for my sake, will be patient.

CHAS. I will be anything, do anything, suffer anything for you, dearest Clara: but consider my situation. A stranger, with no proof of my position but a few letters; no principle to sustain me, but my own consciousness of rectitude; and assailed by a man of wealth, character, influence, who brands me an impostor and a villain!

CLARA. My father will not persist in this.

CHAS. Your fond heart thinks so: but I better know the stubbornness of a proud man's nature. He is so wedded to his pride of republicanism, that he abhors the very name of an aristocrat. And, since it is my misfortune to be the eldest son of a Bavarian nobleman, and heir to his palace and his boundless estates, your father will never cease to hate me.

CLARA. You mistake—you mistake entirely.

It is because my father chooses to disbelieve your story, that he treats you thus. Can you not give him proofs of your truth?

CHAS. As easily as I can bid him good morning: but it requires time. And do you not perceive that, long before I can obtain testimony from Europe, his impetuosity will banish me from the country?

CLARA. What, then, is to be done?

CHAS. There is but one resource. I must fly—the words choke me as I utter them!—fly to escape disgrace.

CLARA. Do not grieve so! all will yet be well. But—you will not leave us?

CHAS. Alas! how can I remain? How can I bear this weight of ignominy?—Could I, indeed, be sure of—but no! no! I will not utter so selfish a thought.

CLARA. Speak! what is it you mean?

CHAS. My dear Clara—I left a happy home to travel through this beautiful land. I was received with the kindest hospitality by your best people. In the midst of the fashionable throng, I

find a lady of surpassing loveliness whose beauty inspires me, literally at first sight, with a passion deep as the sea, changeless as the stars, and pure as the ether that floats between them. But while I am yet in the wild intoxication of this first love, a threatening voice warns me from the enchanted scene. Not a threat of personal violence; that I should despise: but my reputation is threatened. Even this, I might brave, could I brave it alone. But now that your generosity consents to be interested in my welfare, and I am therefore led to see that you would suffer in my disgrace, I am bound as a gentleman to adopt the alternative:—I must leave you immediately and forever.

CLARA. Charles! Charles!—I am imprudent—
—I am rash—I am forgetting myself—but, do not leave me!

CHAS. It is easy to say that: but how am I to endure the ignominy of remaining?

CLARA. The ignominy will not ensue:—or, if it does, Charles—*I will share it with you!*

CHAS. Dear Clara! This noble devotion is more touching than any direct assurance of love. Yet I

were ten times a villain, could I take advantage of your generous self-abandonment.—A thought strikes me! Your father loves you?

CLARA. As his own life.

CHAS. He would not make *you* wretched?

CLARA. 'Twere against nature to suppose it.

CHAS. If, then—forgive me—if we were married——

CLARA. Charles!

CHAS. If we were first married, and I could afterward convince him of my integrity?

CLARA. Were it possible to convince him?

CHAS. Nothing more easy. Now I think of it, yes! certainly! I shall have letters from my father by the next steamer, the very tone of which must convince an unprejudiced mind.

CLARA. I am desperate—I am standing on the verge of an abyss—I—where is Mrs. Jenkins?

MRS. J. (*coming forward.*) Here, my love.

CLARA. My friend—my father's friend—my mother's earliest friend—counsel me! The Count has avowed his preference for me—his—why should I fear to speak it? his passion—his devoted love.

But, my father—you have heard? Well: the Count must fly to escape my father's injustice, unless—unless—my father can be forced as it were to treat him with the consideration he deserves.

MRS. J. My dear, I see it all. I know it all. Your father is mad. Such another match is not to be met with in one's life time.

CLARA. My father is blinded by prejudice; and while under its guidance, he may do some act of irreparable mischief.

MRS. J. Then there is but one sure remedy. Your father will never make you miserable by wronging *your husband*.—You must marry him!

CLARA. Oh, I dare not!

MRS. J. It is but an every-day occurrence. You read it in every novel: you see it in every play: you meet it at every turn in society. Besides, I will give the ceremony my sanction; and, hereafter, your father will thank me for it. Let me send for Doctor Prosey and have it concluded immediately.

CLARA. Do you give me this advice?

MRS. J. To be sure I do. Your father re-

fuses a nobleman on principle: and the moment the nobleman is his son-in-law, he, on principle, will be reconciled to his good fortune. Come into this parlour. I will give you further reasons, and send for the clergyman while you are making up your mind.

Exeunt MRS. J. and CLARA.

CHAS. There! I flatter myself I played that hand according to Hoyle; and, if I don't win the game now, the devil is in it. She is an exquisite creature; and, by heaven! I would not so abuse her confidence if her father had not so abused me. I have a misgiving, too, about my mother. She has a purpose in this marriage which she withholds from me. Let me consider.

TABIT. (*coming forward.*) Count, were you in earnest?

CHAS. Never more so in my life.

TABIT. Do you find me so like her?

CHAS. You! like her!—oh, I forgot: certainly: the very image of my adored Sophronia.

TABIT. Then, you dear, sweet, lovely man, take the long-coveted treasure to your expecting arms.

CHAS. But—madam—you will be discovered.

Enter MRS. RODNEY.

MRS. R. My dear Count! another! are you going to establish a seraglio? That sentimental young lady looks more like your mother than your mistress.

TABIT. Same to yourself, madam! The Count and I understand each other.

MRS. R. If you do not, my dear, it is high time you did. (*Aside.*) Has Clara consented?

CHAS. (*Aside.*) So nearly that you may consider it done. Mrs. Jenkins has sent for the parson.

MRS. R. He is here. He came in this moment. Such news is almost too good to be true.

TABIT. What news is that?

MRS. R. Haven't you heard, my dear? Victoria has another baby.

Enter MRS. JENKINS.

MRS. J. Victoria is what I came to announce. Count, a friend awaits you in the adjoining room.

Exeunt MRS. J. and CHARLES.

TABIT. What *does* all this mean?

MRS. R. Can you keep a secret?

TABIT. Just like a vice.

MRS. R. Very good. The Count has made proposals.

TABIT. To be sure he has. I know that as well as another.

MRS. R. Ay, but to the young lady.

TABIT. Eh—yes—I know it.

MRS. R. The young lady in the next room.

TABIT. I don't believe it—I don't believe one word of it.

Enter MISS LARKINS.

MRS. R. Good morning, Miss Larkins. I am glad you have called. Mrs. Jenkins has prepared a surprise for us.

MISS L. Delightful! What is it?

MRS. R. A runaway match.

MISS L. No!

MRS. R. Fact, upon my word.

MISS L. Do tell me: who is it?

MRS. R. The Count de Bressi and Clara Erskine.

TABIT. I see it now! Fool that I was! I shall faint! I shall expire! I shall drop down dead! I forbid the bans! I forbid the bans!

She rushes to the sliding-doors and throws them open; discovering a clergyman; MRS. JENKINS, and CHARLES RODNEY giving CLARA the bridal kiss.

I forbid the bans!

MRS. J. It is too late, Aunt. The knot is tied.

TABIT. Monster! false, treacherous villain! I'll sue you for damages.

CHAS. Don't take that trouble, aunty. You have sued me quite enough already: stay proceedings, and I'll pay all the damages.

TABIT. Villain!

MRS. J. Now, Clara, my love, courage! I will go with you to your father and tell him the news.

CLARA. Oh, my friend! what will he say?

TABIT. Ay, you may well ask that, you saucy forward minx! I, too, will go to your father. I'll be of that party.

MRS. J. Aunt, you forget yourself.—Fear nothing, my love. Your father will be as happy as the rest of us, now he can't help himself.

Exeunt all but CHAS. and MRS. R.

CHAS. Mother, when a man signs a bond for his friend, or takes a wife for himself, he has good reason to be alarmed at the responsibility he assumes. But, in this case, it is *you* who are agitated.

MRS. R. The suddenness and, so far, the completeness of my triumph, almost overpower me.

CHAS. Triumph *so far*, good mother? How much farther would you carry it?

MRS. R. Umph! one step farther—the final step!

CHAS. This is a day of surprises and mysteries: I don't understand. (*Aside.*) Hold! by heaven, perhaps I do understand!

MRS. R. Come to me to-morrow, and you shall know what I know.

CHAS. (*Aside.*) Aha! I must put this to the proof. Eh,—meantime, I suppose the injunction on my left-glove is removed. I can take it off?

MRS. R. For the love of God, no! not for your life!

CHAS. Good lord, mother! you frighten me.

MRS. R. By all that is sacred in love and sweet in vengeance,—promise me not to remove that glove to-day—at least, in Erskine's presence.

CHAS. (*Aside.*) So, so!—It's a promise,—but remember: no secrets after to-day.

MRS. R. Be it so. You shall know all in the morning. Good-bye, Charles. I rely on you.

Exit MRS. RODNEY.

CHAS. And I now rely on myself! Mother, you are as vindictive as the arch-enemy, but you have the cunning only of his imps. I have your

secret—thank God! I have your secret; and I have it *in time*! And what a secret! What a determined purpose! What an infernal revenge! It is balked, though, even at its crisis! How it may fare with me—how I am to extricate myself from this dilemma, is a problem indeed! But—*my sister is saved!*

Exit.

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT FOURTH.

SCENE I.

Erskine's Drawing-room.

Enter ERSKINE *and* FREDERICK.

ERSK. My dear boy, it is because we have long been on such terms of intimacy as might exist between father and son, that I can speak to you on this subject at all. It is no light thing for a parent to plead the cause of his daughter to a lover whom she has discarded: but I know *you* will appreciate my motives, as I think you can truly estimate her inconsiderate folly. My unmasking this impostor will, doubtless, cure her caprice. But, even then, Frederick, I know she must fall greatly in your regard. Yet, let me hope that you will visit us as before?—You will not aban-

don my child, although she has deserved it at your hands?

FRED. My dear Mr. Erskine, deeply as I have been wounded by Clara's ill treatment, I am even more grieved to see how it distresses you.—Be content. I will visit you as before. And if, in time, Clara can forget the past, I will have nothing to forgive.

ERSK. My noble friend! I made sure that I could rely on your generosity.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. Mrs. Jenkins, sir, and another lady, with Miss Erskine, desire to know if you are particularly engaged.

ERSK. I am quite at leisure, Stephen. Beg them to walk in.

Exit SERVANT.

FRED. I had better withdraw.

ERSK. As you will, Frederick. I have your promise.

Exit FREDERICK.

Enter MRS. JENKINS, TABITHA *and* CLARA.

MRS. JENKINS, you are so much of a stranger at my house, I must give you a ceremonious welcome.—Madam, your servant.

MRS. J. My aunt, Mr. Erskine.

ERSK. Ah, from Tarrytown? You are welcome to New York. Clara, my love, have you been out this morning?

CLARA. Yes—sir——

TABIT. Go on Miss! tell your story, if you dare to tell it.

CLARA. It seems to me that I shall die!

TABIT. Never believe it! people don't die so easily.

ERSK. What is the meaning of this, Clara? Pray, be quiet, madam; the bold assurance of your tone is intolerable at this moment.

TABIT. Oh, very well; just as you please, sir. But I fancy I am the only one from whom you are likely to get the truth.

ERSK. Ha! what, in heaven's name, is the truth?

TABIT. Your daughter is married.

ERSK. There is an indication of *some* catastrophe in this silence and confusion. *Married*, do you say? When? How? Where? By whom? To whom?

TABIT. I cannot answer all these questions in a breath; but the happy man is the Count de Bressi.

ERSK. (*violently seizing Clara.*) So help me God, if this is true——

MRS. J. Mr. Erskine! help!

TABIT. Help! help!

MRS. J. What is the wretch going to do?

ERSK. (*still grasping Clara.*) Her mother's image—my own heart's idol—pale as death itself—her sweetness and helplessness unman me. There, my child! do not sob; do not weep:—ring, some of you; call the maid-servants:—hush; hush; my little pet: my own darling: there; there; there.

Enter SERVANTS.

Take her to her room, and remain with her. Send for the doctor. Gently: gently.

Servants take CLARA out.

Madam, you have been long known, and it is your miserable ambition to be known, as a match-maker. I presume I am indebted to you for this morning's handiwork?

MRS. J. Mr. Erskine, you are the strangest man I ever knew. You half kill your daughter by violence, and now you have nothing for it but to insult an old friend by abuse.

ERSK. Friendship like yours, Mrs. Jenkins, would meet its fitting associates in hell: and the office you undertake has its origin where your friendship finds its home. You would dive into the heart and profane the secrets that dwell between its possessor and its God: and those gentle impulses of the soul that heaven has implanted there to seek their own likings by a preternatural instinct, you would tamper with and overrule, and adapt to your own notions of expediency, that you may match human beings in matrimony as horses are matched in harness. No feeling of delicacy, no sense of shame restrains you. You do the dirty work of society; and there is no class of society but is elevated enough to despise you for your nains.

MRS. J. Come, Aunt. We have listened long enough to this vulgar person.

TABIT. Upon my word, he talks beautifully. Well, if you are going—good morning, sir: I assure you, I did my best to prevent this.

Exeunt MRS. JENKINS and TABITHA.

ERSK. What avail wealth, position, character, against the devastating breath of calamity? They are but so many elevations in the landscape of life, which catch the first blast of the whirlwind and reel lowest beneath its fury. The level of insignificance is the safest refuge from the storm.

Enter DR. STUBBS.

Doctor, this is very kind of you.

DOCT. S. My dear friend, I was coming to you when I received your message. I had just seen Mrs. Rodney and learned the particulars.

ERSK. Ha! Mrs. Rodney!

DOCT. S. It was not her doing. It was at Mrs. Jenkins's reception. Mrs. Rodney chanced to call just as the ceremony was concluded.

ERSK. You have seen Clara?—How is she?

DOCT. S. More composed than at first.

ERSK. There is no doubt of the truth of this story?

DOCT. S. None whatever. Doctor Prosy officiated.

ERSK. The heartless scoundrel! I took that man a cabin-boy from a steamboat: educated him: endowed him: and he has not hesitated to join in this robbery of my life. Mrs. Jenkins, too! you know the extent of her obligations. But this is my invariable experience: my worst enemies are those who are most indebted to me.—It is trifling to dwell on these aggravations of a wound, when the wound itself reaches from my heart to my brain and racks every sense with agony. Doctor, it is more than I can bear.

DOCT. S. I will not attempt to minister to your grief: it is beyond the power of sympathy: it will have its course; and you must bow before it. But, my dear Erskine, this is a world in which joys and sorrows, responsibilities and duties are intermingled. The most overpowering grief must give place to our social obligations.

ERSK. You would have me go upon 'Change and mingle with men, as if I had a heart in my bosom?—as if I had any thing to live for?—I cannot do it.

DOCT. S. You need not. But you must not absent yourself from the world. You must not neglect the new duties that devolve upon you.—Clara will need your counsel and aid more than ever.

ERSK. True: true: true.

DOCT. S. She has no mother; nor any, but you, who can act in a mother's place. If her husband—I know: I know: this chafes you to madness. But we must look truth in the face: nothing is gained by shutting our eyes to it.—If her husband prove kind and attentive, why, as the world goes, Clara might have done worse, and the case is not desperate.

ERSK. The wretch is an impostor. His letters are forged.

DOCT. S. Is it possible!

ERSK. I say it, of my own knowledge.

DOCT. S. This is a dreadful truth! have you repeated it?

ERSK. Only to Frederick.

DOCT. S. Then bury the secret. To divulge it, would harm you more than him. And who knows? By virtue of his good fortune, he may acquit himself reputably yet.

ERSK. Never. A man obscure and *honest*, may stumble upon fortune and remain honest; but he who, with deliberate purpose, undertakes a fraud and enters society with a lie in his right hand, what can we hope from him?

DOCT. S. In this case, we must hope. If he has obtained Clara's affections—which he must have done—you but crush her by crushing him: so that the security of your own peace lies in your making the best of this. Reconcile yourself to it, outwardly at least; and every fool of the fashionable world will long for that which you wish to repudiate. They were all in full chase after this lord; and the lord knows he might have had his choice among them. You have what they desire; they envy you with all their hearts, and you, therefore, occupy the very pinnacle of their regard: once fall to the degradation of their pity, and you are a

gone man. This is philosophical nonsense, but it is also worldly wisdom ; and while we are in the world, we must conform to some of its follies, or, be overborne by them. In short, this is a misfortune, to be endured like other misfortunes, with manly fortitude : any other course is madness.

ERSK. My judgment approves your counsel :—but my heart rebels.

DOCT. S. It will do so, now : but grief must yield to time.

ERSK. Unless more calamities follow in the train of this.—Suppose he is unkind to her?

DOCT. S. Leave forebodings to the future. The present has cares enough for the best and the happiest.

(rings.)

I am going to send for Clara.

ERSK. Doctor—you are pressing me too far.

Enter SERVANT.

DOCT. S. Stephen, request Miss Erskine to step here.

Exit SERVANT.

You have chosen me as a counsellor : and, though I possess no superhuman wisdom, I insist on your being guided by me to the end.

Enter CLARA.

Clara, my child, I am endeavouring to console your father under a dreadful affliction ; but I need your assistance.

He leads CLARA toward her father. She stands passive at ERSKINE'S side for a moment : then she seizes his hand and kneels to him. ERSKINE at first stands firm : after a time, he turns, and raises her.

ERSK. You do not remember your mother, Clara ? You were three years old when she died. I thought, then, I had nothing to live for. Yet you were left : and when I saw the lost one gradually return to me in the remaining one, I became quieted, consoled, happy.—Another misfortune has now overtaken me ; and, this time, I have no little Clara to relieve my aching heart.

CLARA. Father!—forgive me, even if you kill me!

ERSK. My child, we are in God's hands, and it is His will that we should live in peace and harmony. I bring no accusation: I utter no reproach: at another time, you may explain how my impetuosity drove you to—well, no matter! I forgive you and I wish you to forgive yourself. My kind friend has made me see the duties and the necessities of my position.—Do you—love—oh, how this tries my purpose!—do you love the man you have married?

CLARA. Not wronging you, papa—with my whole heart.

ERSK. And you believe he loves you?

CLARA. He has protested it by the most solemn assurances, and his conduct corroborates his words.

ERSK. Heaven grant that you may be right, and I deceived! To sum all in a word—tell him—tell him that I am eccentric, impetuous, unsocial—but that my house must be his home.—I cannot live without you.

CLARA. Papa, this kindness is almost as painful as your anger.

ERSK. Will you walk with me, doctor? I must have air.—Clara, my love, you have long been my house-keeper: be now mistress of my house. I am henceforth your guest: but always your father: always your father: always your father.

Exeunt.

SCENE II.

Mrs. Jenkins's.

Enter TABITHA.

TABIT. It's little good these people will get by getting married—that's one comfort. The Count will soon find what these boarding-school Misses are good for. Besides, won't he catch it, when he comes to show his face to his father-in-law? Serves him right! to trifle with my feelings in such an

unprincipled manner. Eh! here he comes with Susan. I wonder what is in the wind now? Another secret, most likely. I'll find it out in season this time; for I'll hide in this recess and listen.

Exit TABITHA.

Enter MRS. JENKINS and CHARLES.

MRS. J. Positively, you are the most gallant gentleman I ever knew.

CHAS. Nay, this is not gallantry; but a simple expression of gratitude for your kindness.

MRS. J. Well, if you will have it so, there's my hand:—but you must not kiss it so loud.

CHAS. My dear Mrs. Jenkins, if my gratitude is to be measured by my caresses, they will not stop at the hand.

(offers to kiss her lips.)

MRS. J. Oh, Count! on your wedding day! What would the Countess say?

CHAS. Countess? Egad, that's true: she is a Countess, sure enough. What the Countess *would* say, is neither here nor there. I trust we are alone?

MRS. J. Good gracious! I believe so: why?

CHAS. I have a secret for you.

MRS. J. Good: what is it?

CHAS. You needn't be jealous of the Countess.

MRS. J. Why not?

CHAS. I thought I heard a noise. I see no one. But, as walls have ears, I will whisper it.

(whispers her a moment, and ends by kissing her.)

MRS. J. Count, I shall be offended. I shall, indeed. As to your secret, I can only say,—pshaw!

CHAS. It's true, upon my honour.

MRS. J. Pooh! pooh! such a thing was never heard of.

CHAS. Not the less true on that account. I give you my word, I shall never know whether the Countess is—I'll be sworn, I heard a noise.

MRS. J. Nothing but whispers of your conscience.

CHAS. Oh, if you talk of conscience, I have a ready answer.

(attempts to kiss her.)

MRS. J. Hush!

TABIT. (*coming forward.*) Hush! hush! hush!

CHAS. Good heavens! Mrs. Pippin!

TABIT. Hush! hush! hush!

MRS. J. Aunt, when *did* you come in?

TABIT. Hush! hush! hush!—" *I have a secret for you. You needn't be jealous of the Countess!*" Pray, sir, how many ladies are sufficient for one lord?

CHAS. Upon my word, you quite overpower me. Consider my feelings.

TABIT. *Your* feelings, you brute! What do you think of *my* feelings? A halter would be too good for you. And you, too, Susan! Shame! shame! But I'll expose you.

CHAS. No!

TABIT. I will.

CHAS. What will you do?

TABIT. I'll make New-York ring with it.

CHAS. With what?

TABIT. That you kissed Mrs. Jenkins.

CHAS. Add one thing to the story and nobody will believe you.

TABIT. What is that?

CHAS. Tell the people—

*(catches her around the neck and
kisses her tremendously.)*

Tell the good people, Aunt, that I kissed you at the same time.

Exit CHARLES.

TABIT. Help! murder! what a monster!

MRS. J. What a wretch!

TABIT. What a villain!

MRS. J. What a ruffian!

TABIT. *You* needn't talk, Susan.

MRS. J. Nor *you*, I am sure, Aunt. I never saw a man kiss so outrageously in my life: it's positively scandalous:—ha! ha! ha! ha! I really thought the man was going to eat you alive. But don't be alarmed, Aunt. I'll never mention it: I'll never say a word about it:—ha! ha! ha!

TABIT. Susan, you are the most brazen hussy I ever saw in my life. I—really—I shall leave the room.

Exit TABITHA.

MRS. J. You couldn't go in a better time, my dear ; for here comes Mrs. Spooney.

Enter MRS. SPOONEY.

MRS. SP. Mrs. Jenkins, I have a great mind never to speak to you again.

MRS. J. Why, my dear, what is the matter with *you* ?

MRS. SP. To think that you would not give me even a hint of this match !

MRS. J. To tell you the truth, we got it up so suddenly, I hardly knew it myself. Besides, if I had advertised my project, don't you perceive it might have reached Mr. Erskine's ears, and thus have been defeated altogether ?

MRS. SP. I don't think Mr. Erskine would have gone much out of his way, to defeat such a project !

MRS. J. Don't you ! You ought to have heard him compliment me for my share in it. I never saw a man in such a rage.

MRS. SP. Well, he is bravely over it. He has made up with Clara, invited the Count to his

house; and the Count's trunks are now at his door.

MRS. J. You astonish me!

MRS. SP. I see nothing astonishing in it. Mr. Erskine has consented to be reconciled to the first match in the country. If he was angry, it is only because the thing was done without his help.

MRS. J. Isn't Clara lucky?

MRS. SP. Very; but I doubt if the Count cares for her.

MRS. J. I am sure he doesn't.

MRS. SP. How should you know?

MRS. J. I, indeed! I have been in his confidence all along.

MRS. SP. You in his confidence! Very likely!

MRS. J. Don't be jealous, Mrs. Spooner: it's an exceedingly unbecoming passion.

MRS. SP. Don't flatter yourself, my dear, that I shall be jealous of you with the Count. He and I understand each other.

MRS. J. I presume you think so, my dear. He told me he would make you think so.

MRS. SP. He told me that he *had* made you think so.

MRS. J. Mrs. Spooney, I have to remark, that is not true.

MRS. SP. Well, that's civil! But I can pardon you, my dear, considering how you have been duped. There, now, is something that speaks for itself: a ruby-ring that was given to the Count by the princess-royal of Bavaria.

(shows a ring.)

MRS. J. And by the said Count presented to Mrs. Jenkins of New-York.

(shows a similar ring.)

Very like, isn't it? ha! ha! ha!

MRS. SP. I don't see much to laugh at.

MRS. J. Nor I. It strikes me that we are both in a ridiculous predicament: and the more prudently we keep our own counsel, the better. I begin to suspect that these noblemen, though sufficiently exclusive in rank, are rather promiscuous in privilege.

Exeunt.

SCENE III.

*Erskine's Drawing-room.**Enter ERSKINE and CLARA.*

ERSK. My dear daughter, it is needless to speak of your husband's ignorance of American customs. A man who has to learn what he disregards, has never been familiar with refined society any where. On this, his wedding-day, after making this house his home, he absents himself from dinner; and now, at ten o'clock in the evening, he is absent still.

CLARA. Papa, I am at a loss for words altogether. I cannot meet your objections without offending your pride. I am very unhappy.

ERSK. This must not be, Clara. You and yours must be at ease and at home in this house. I have no other home; and discord here would banish me from the earth. Let us both learn to bear and forbear.

Enter MRS. SPRIGGINS.

MRS. S. Clara, my love, you must forgive the liberty I take in making an evening call.

CLARA. We are always happy to see you, Mrs. Spriggins.

ERSK. You are serious, I suppose, in apologising for a visit at the only time in the twenty-four hours when a visit has any value?

MRS. S. My dear sir! Evening visiting, by common consent, has been banished from good society these twenty years at least.

ERSK. Then for twenty years, in my opinion, good society has been good for nothing. Pray, what are the duties and occupations of good society as now established in New-York?

MRS. S. They are very simple. We leave cards upon our friends once a-year. Once in a week, we have receptions, when our friends call and talk of the weather and the fashions for ten minutes. We accept invitations to balls four times in a week, and as much oftener as we can get them. Preparations for these occupy us from breakfast at

eleven o'clock until half-past ten in the evening. And when we get to the balls, we say how d'ye do?—stand, push, squeeze around hot and crowded rooms, look at the children dancing, and are too happy when supper is announced. We go to the Opera three times in a week, where we see every body and learn and retail all the scandal of the day. We go to church of a Sunday morning in the fashionable season, provided the weather is good and the coachman disposed. And, finally, we go to the theatre whenever a dancer is announced who can swing her foot above the top of her head. Thus, you see, evening visiting, among the real quality, is quite out of the question. And, now, if my apology for breaking my own rule is sufficient, allow me to congratulate you, my dear Clara, on your brilliant alliance.

CLARA. You are very kind.

MRS. S. Do you know, Mr. Erskine, that I suspect you, with your obstinate republican notions, are not more than half pleased with this match?

ERSK. How can you doubt my gratification at any thing which makes Clara happy?

MRS. S. But, bless me! all this while, where is the Count?

CLARA. He has gone out.

ERSK. Yes—he is not at home.

MRS. S. (*Aside.*) I see: trouble already!—Give my love to him, Clara: and tell him, if his wife has not made a good bargain, he has. Now, pray, pardon this atrociously long visit, and don't tell any of our circle that I was here of an evening at all.

Exit MRS. SPRIGGINS.

ERSK. That is one of the best specimens of her class, for I believe there is nothing morally wrong about her, and she has sense enough to be half ashamed of the career she follows. What a farce is her whole life on her own showing! But what most vexes me in these fashionables, is their arrogance toward respectable people out of their circle, and their toleration of vice within it. The woman who has no character to lose—and there are such among our exclusives—if she but belongs to “the set” and is “received,” is the dear friend of

every member of this select community. Want of character is nothing: want of caste is every thing. Rely on it, Clara, there is in society an intermediate stratum—under the froth and above the dregs—which contains all that is really *good* in the whole compound.—Clara, it is eleven o'clock.

CLARA. Now, papa!

ERSK. I made no comment, my child; but, lest I should make one that is disagreeable—good night.

Exit ERSKINE.

CLARA. Were I not sure that my father's prejudice would give place to the result of his future observation, I should be wretched indeed!

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

CHAS. What, Clara, still waiting?

CLARA. Waiting, Charles!

CHAS. I said, waiting. I made sure you would be asleep before this time.

CLARA. You told me, it might be eleven before you came home.

CHAS. Child! could you not understand by that, I wished no one to sit up for me?

CLARA. I understood nothing, Charles, but your plain words—and your words, now, seem so strange!

CHAS. Pardon me, my lovely Countess,—but I have passed the evening with friends who pledge nothing but bumpers, and—I am a little confused. Nay, you are not going to be angry?

CLARA. Charles, you frighten me! My father thinks your conduct improper and unkind—and I think so too.

CHAS. Remember, my little queen, that it is bad taste to quote a father against a husband. I didn't marry him, you know.

(kisses her hand.)

There, there; don't pout: but go to your room. I have such a head-ache, I will sleep on this sofa. Good night.

CLARA. Good night. It seems a pity, Charles, that you came home at all.

Exit CLARA.

CHAS. Married to my sister : son-in-law to my own father : and both wishing me at the devil. One, because I have done a wrong with my eyes shut ; the other, because I refuse a wrong with my eyes open. How I am to manage this little affair, passes all the present invention of my philosophy. As Richard says,

“ Here will I lie to-night : but where, to-morrow ? ”

Egad ! the whole thing is more like a play than a reality. Yet I am I. This is a sofa. And up stairs is my unlawful wife in a towering passion.

(he lies down.)

Good night, every body ! Pleasant dreams : but look out for breakers to-morrow !

END OF ACT FOURTH.

ACT FIFTH.

SCENE I.

Erskine's Drawing-room.

Enter ERSKINE.

ERSK. My forebodings were but too well-founded. He has thrust himself into my little Paradise and destroyed its peace forever.—Can it be—the thought *has* flashed across my mind—can it be that Mrs. Rodney had an agency in this? It is like her work. The curse is such as she would call down. She warned me that my refusal to marry her should cost me more than life—and the premonitions of such a penalty are on me! How am I to school myself to meet this man and so to treat him as to maintain my compact with my daughter?

Enter CLARA.

CLARA. Good morning, papa. Are you not well, sir?

ERSK. I slept but little, my child.—Where is—

CLARA. In the conservatory, Stephen says. He will be here in a moment.

ERSK. Is the breakfast served?

CLARA. Not yet, sir.

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

CHAS. Good morning, Clara. Good morning, Mr. Erskine. I hope I have not kept you waiting?

ERSK. Not at all: not at all. Our breakfast is not yet ready. You Europeans, I believe, do not relish our substantial American breakfasts?

CHAS. Oh, I became accustomed to them in the West-Indies.

ERSK. In——?

CHAS. In the West-Indies.

ERSK. Have you resided in the West-Indies?

CHAS. I was born there.

ERSK. Is it possible!

CHAS. My father removed from there many years ago: but I have often revisited the scenes of my childhood.

ERSK. Eh—I beg your pardon—what part of the West Indies?

CHAS. The island of Jamaica.

ERSK. Kingston?

CHAS. In and near Kingston. Were you ever there?

ERSK. Yes—many years ago.

CLARA. Charles, you have a habit that puzzles me.

CHAS. What is it? Pray, use no ceremony with me.

CLARA. You always wear your left-glove: is it a fashion?

CHAS. Not at all. It's my superstition.

CLARA. How so?

CHAS. I have a curiously mutilated finger; and my mother always told me my good fortune would cease, if I allowed strangers to see it.

CLARA. We are not strangers ; nor are we superstitious. Take off your glove.

CHAS. What say you, Mr. Erskine ?

ERSK. I may reply, with Hamlet : " We defy augury ; for there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow."

CHAS. Good bye, then, superstition.

(he takes off his glove.)

CLARA. How curious ! What is that on your hand above the fingers ?

CHAS. A strawberry.

ERSK. Great God !

CLARA. Dear father !

CHAS. My dear sir !

ERSK. It's nothing—ha ! ha ! ha !—it's only *my* superstition ! Was that caused by an accident ? Do you remember when it happened ?

CHAS. It has been there from my infancy—so my mother told me.

ERSK. Your mother—is she living ?

CHAS. Yes ; and almost at my elbow.

ERSK. In heaven's name, what do you mean ?

CHAS. The steamers arrive so often, and make their trips so rapidly, one's friends in Europe are almost like one's neighbours in an adjoining street.

ERSK. True! Strange, how a familiar fact sometimes startles one! Is your father living?

CHAS. He is; and in excellent health. I should be delighted to have him know you as my father—in-law.

ERSK. Clara, my love, you will excuse me. I have an early engagement down town. Good morning. (*Aside.*) If this catastrophe has a still deeper abyss of horror, I must fathom it and die!

Exit ERSKINE.

CHAS. A very eccentric gentleman, upon my word! Clara, my love, is papa often thus?

CLARA. My father is very unhappy—and so am I.

CHAS. My dearest Clara?

CLARA. Charles,—actions, not words, make up the reality of life: and your terms of endearment, after your recent conduct, are but insults to my understanding. I will say nothing in

extenuation of my own sacrifice of delicacy, principle, duty, in consenting to a clandestine marriage: but I will ask if *you* are the one to make me regret my imprudence and curse my folly?

CHAS. There is a deal of force in what you say, Clara; and what you say, you say remarkably well. But the truth is, when I married you, I did not know exactly what I was doing.

CLARA. I am not so fallen in my own estimation, sir, as to submit to language intended to be insulting.

Exit CLARA.

CHAS. Well! if ever I marry my sister again, for the sake of a position in society—hang me: that's all. I am conducting myself like a pirate to that dear girl, because I am totally at a loss what to do. I will go to my mother—Heaven forgive me if I forget she is my mother!—and from her I may learn something that, in her despite, I can turn to good account. At least, I have now an honest motive to guide me.

Exit.

SCENE II.

*Mrs. Rodney's.**Enter* MRS. RODNEY.

MRS. R. This is a notable victory! Each party is so entangled that he cannot betray any one of his associates: and he who is the chief victim must bear his fate in silence. What can Erskine do, when he knows the full extent of his calamity? Will he sacrifice his own son? Will he expose his implication with me? Will he allow Clara's ruin to be trumpeted to the world?

Enter ERSKINE.

ERSK. Madam, I beg pardon for intruding.

MRS. R. No intrusion at all, Mr. Erskine. Pray, be seated.

ERSK. Thank you.—I have called on an errand of the most painful interest to myself: perhaps to you.

MRS. R. What is it?

ERSK. My daughter's marriage.

MRS. R. How can that event possibly interest me?

ERSK. Nay, in honest plainness, Adelaide—

MRS. R. Sir!

ERSK. Forgive me if, in this hour of agony, I use a familiarity that you but recently applied to me.

MRS. R. And do you, here and now, venture to recall that interview? Since you do so, let me remind you, that was *my* hour of agony and yours of scorn. I have not forgotten the lesson!

ERSK. Had you cognizance of this marriage?

MRS. R. I had.

ERSK. And yet, you suffered it to take place?

MRS. R. Not only that, I aided in its consummation.

ERSK. Who is this man?

MRS. R. The Count de Bressi.

ERSK. That is not his name. His letters are forged.

MRS. R. Nay, if you know his history, why apply to me?

ERSK. Because I am on the rack; and because, equivocate as you may, I *know* you are fully possessed of the truth.

MRS. R. Admit that I am. What have I to gain by imparting it?

ERSK. I conjure you, by your hopes of heaven.

MRS. R. I abandoned them, when you spurned me from your feet.

ERSK. Then by your fears of hell.

MRS. R. When I swore vengeance on you, I set both worlds at defiance.

ERSK. What are you?

MRS. R. To you, a demon: an avenging fury:—in the recesses of my own soul, a disappointed, heart-broken woman.

ERSK. What sacrifice, on my part, can appease you?

MRS. R. None: it is too late: the work of vengeance is accomplished!

ERSK. Tell me—and tell me truly—this man: is he——by heaven, I cannot put my question into words!—*Answer my thought!*

MRS. R. Ha! ha! ha!

ERSK. Woman! by the Eternal Spirit that sways our destiny, if you drive me mad, you will find yourself grappled by a maniac.—Answer me on your life!

MRS. R. Charles Erskine, dare you threaten me! ME!

ERSK. I am but a child in the grasp of Omnipotence, and you are a fiend empowered to work out my curse.—Well.—Here I stand, baring my bosom to the shock.—Let the thunderbolt fall!

MRS. R. The thunderbolt is a tiny thing to look upon—but mark its scathing power! You desire to know, who is the Count de Bressi?

(she produces the coral and bells.)

He is the owner of this trinket.

ERSK. It has reft my heart and stunned my brain. The work is, indeed, accomplished! I reel and totter with the intoxication of despair.

Exit ERSKINE.

MRS. R. The triumph is complete! Vengeance has nothing more to wish for.

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

Ha ! my brave boy ! my victorious captain ! Welcome from the field ! Did you meet your honoured father-in-law ?

CHAS. I met him, but he did not see me. He seemed to see nothing. He sped on like a madman. What can you have done, to work such a sudden transformation ?

MRS. R. I, Indeed ! What could I do ? I, a woman ? No matter. The farce is drawing to a close and my part is done. Take this parchment. It is your secret. It contains a minute and certified record of your birth, childhood, manhood : and will establish your identity before any legal tribunal. Keep it safely ; but do not open it, until you have occasion to do so.

CHAS. Whither away ? You speak as if this were a leave-taking.

MRS. R. It is. I have fulfilled my destiny, and shall return to England to-morrow. I will pay my respects to your wife in the course of the

morning. Take care of the parchment. *That* is no forgery!

Exeunt.

SCENE III.

Mrs. Jenkins's.

Enter MRS. JENKINS, MRS. SPRIGGINS, *and*
TABITHA.

MRS. J. I never undertook a match that I did not accomplish. But this, being a Count on the one hand, and the richest heiress of New-York on the other, is so brilliant an achievement, I think it will do to retire on.

TABIT. Don't be in too great a hurry to retire: I am not yet provided for.

MRS. S. And there is Katy Larkins, a pet with all of us; engaged, to my certain knowledge, for the last twelve months, to Alfred Spooney. You must do something for her.

MRS. J. Really, one cannot do every thing!—What is the matter with Alfred?

MRS. S. Completely spoiled by his trip to Europe. Since his return, he has done nothing but oil his moustaches, and said nothing but—
“really, ’pon my honour.” I think, now, if we could manage to get the hair off the outside of his head, there would be some hope that his brains might become settled in the inside. ✓

MRS. J. Mrs. Spriggins—the battle of the Nile was the result of an accidental suggestion; and your remark gives me an idea. More than that, here is the very man to assist us.

Enter DOCTOR STUBBS.

Doctor, how do you administer the chloroform?

DOCT. S. Lady—wet a bit of cotton with it, and let the patient inhale the evaporation.

MRS. J. That’s very simple: any one can do it.—Eh, Mrs. Spriggins?

DOCT. S. True, lady: any one can do it, and any one can overdo it. Give too much, and it’s a coroner’s inquest and Greenwood cemetery. Do

this under the advice of a physician, lady, or you may wake up some fine morning and find yourself in the Tombs. What operation is to be performed?

MRS. J. A friend wants a tooth out: nothing more.

DOCT. S. Take her to Parmly. His instruments and his skill in using them are better than the chloroform.

MRS. J. (*to Mrs. S.*) We must take the risk of this. I'll send a message to Alfred and another to the apothecary. We'll treat the youth as Delilah treated Samson.

Exeunt MRS J. and MRS. S.

DOCT. S. I presume, lady, you are the friend suffering with the tooth-ache?

TABIT. Oh, no! I never had a tooth-ache in my life. In fact, doctor, I rather pride myself on my teeth.

DOCT. S. Hum—true, lady: and with good reason.—I wonder where Mrs. Jenkins has gone?—As I was saying; yes: white; regular in arrange-

ment; uniform in size. Upon my word, madam, your teeth indicate good health and good temper. They give sweetness to your smile and sound the alarm to—a sirloin.

TABIT. Doctor, you are a dreadful quiz.

DOCT. S. Lady, mention it not: breathe it not.—Where the devil is Mrs. Jenkins?

TABIT. Eh—doctor—

DOCT. S. Lady?

TABIT. I want, doctor—a little advice.

DOCT. S. Professional, lady?

TABIT. Oh, no!—at least—that is—yes.

DOCT. S. Your hand, if you please. Pulse agitated: eye wavering: breath intermittent. I would recommend nine Brandreth's pills over night, and a pail of congress-water next morning.—Are you ever troubled with palpitation of the heart, lady?

TABIT. Yes, doctor—frequently—sometimes.

DOCT. S. Oh, lord! will Mrs. Jenkins never come?—Eh, palpitation when you have been running up stairs, I suppose?

TABIT. That is not quite it. But when my

sympathies are enlisted for a friend; or when I try to explain my feelings to—to—the doctor—

DOCT. S. Lady, I think I hear Mrs. Jenkins.

TABIT. No—she has gone out. As I was saying, I have a little matter of business, doctor; and I should have such confidence in your judgment—that—

DOCT. S. Well, madam, out with it, for heaven's sake!

TABIT. The plain truth of the matter is, doctor, I have here script for fifty thousand dollars New-York State sevens of 1850, just about to be paid off, and I want a prudent friend's advice about re-investing the money.

DOCT. S. (*Aside.*) Double and thunder! This is a style of love-making rather more to the purpose than her cursed sentiment! Fifty thousand! good heavens!—hem! I am considering, my dear Miss Pippin: ah: true: I have it. It's very fortunate you spoke of this.—Fifty thousand!—Eh, what do you prefer yourself, Miss Pippin? What particular stock do you fancy?

TABIT. Any thing, doctor, but fancy stocks.

My preference is for the solid, substantial, middle-aged—I mean, dividend-paying securities.

DOCT. S. If you would confide in my judgment—

TABIT. Oh, doctor, I would confide every thing to you.

DOCT. S. Dear lady—hem !

Enter MRS. JENKINS and MRS. SPRIGGINS.

MRS. J. Doctor, would a teaspoon-full be an over-dose ?

DOCT. S. What's a teaspoon-full to fifty thou—eh !—I beg pardon, lady : you speak of the chloroform ?

Servant enters, gives a note to MRS. JENKINS, and exit.

MRS. J. Yes, doctor.—Stay, what's this ? From Mr. Erskine.

(reads.) “ *Mr. Erskine, with an apology and his compliments, begs Mrs. Jenkins and all who were present at the marriage, to call at his house immediately.* ”

MRS. S. What can this mean?

DOCT. S. I must see him, without delay. Ladies, you will excuse me?—Miss Pippin, may I beg a word with you?

Exeunt DR. STUBBS and TABITHA.

MRS. J. The man has come to his senses, as I knew he would. But we must provide for Alfred in the first place. He will be here directly, and you shall see if there are not more ways than one of bringing fickle-minded men to their duty.

Exeunt.

SCENE IV.

*Erskine's Drawing-room.**Enter* ERSKINE.

ERSK. At times, coincidences strike us with a singular power! Last night, in no mood, heaven knows, to seek amusement, but rather to escape from my own thoughts, I strolled into the theatre: and there, of all plays in the language, and of all scenes in that play, I chanced upon the Fourth Act of *Virginus*. The fond father, seeing his child about to be dishonoured, stabs her before the assembled multitudes of Rome.—A memorable tragedy! An act of devotion that has immortalized his name and caused thousands of a remote posterity to admire the godlike heroism of his sacrifice. How close is the parallel to my own case!—except in this—he saved his daughter from dishonour: I can but prevent the continuance of—oh! can a just God permit this extremity of ruin?

Enter CLARA.

My poor, sweet, lost darling!—kiss me. Thus to embrace you, and thus to die, were best!

CLARA. My dear father! do not give way to such wildness of grief. Charles is strange, eccentric, unkind: but my dear father! there is nothing to call for this dreadful outbreak of sorrow. I have exaggerated this: I have, papa. And I have provoked him, too, by my petulance. Now smooth over your brow and smile again, and I will be a better girl; I will, indeed, papa!

ERSK. My poor child! you know not—her simple unconsciousness stabs me to the soul!

Enter CHARLES RODNEY.

CHAS. Mr. Erskine, you must forgive me for interrupting you: you do not yet know all.

ERSK. Peace; peace; I know far too much. To add to my knowledge were to blacken the gloomy aspect of despair.

CHAS. I must, nevertheless, persist; and you will justify my resolution. What you now know,

was unknown to me until the ceremony was performed. Immediately afterward, I was led to suspect and substantially to discover the truth, and—I have been governed by it.

ERSK. Explain yourself!—a ray of light breaks in upon me.

CHAS. I guessed my mother's secret too soon for her infernal purpose, and in time to defeat it.

ERSK. The proof! the proof! give me the proof!

CHAS. I absented myself yesterday afternoon and evening on purpose to offend Clara—

ERSK. Yes—yes—yes—

CHAS. And I passed the night on that sofa. Her anger is the proof of my integrity.

ERSK. My boy! my son! my saviour! I shall go mad with joy as but now I was like to do with agony. Come, both of you, to my library. We shall be interrupted here. I sent for some people for a very different purpose. Come. The hand of God protects us still.

Exeunt.

Enter DOCTOR STUBBS.

DOCT. S. Eh? all out? nobody at home? What on earth is the matter? Something very remarkable is going on somewhere!

Enter MRS. JENKINS, MRS. SPRIGGINS, MISS LARKINS, TABITHA : *and after them, SERVANTS bringing ALFRED on a chair ; his hair cropped short, moustaches and whiskers all gone.*

MRS. J. Oh, doctor ! doctor ! we couldn't stop to send for you ; and we brought him with us and followed you. I am afraid we have killed him !

DOCT. S. What's the matter, lady ? Has the young gentleman got the cholera ?

MRS. J. I wish it were no worse ! We gave him an overdose, doctor.

DOCT. S. Of what, lady ?

MRS. J. Of that confounded chloroform.

DOCT. S. Is that all ? Don't disturb yourself, then, lady. I'll restore him in a jiffy.

*(he takes a vial from his pocket
and holds it to ALFRED's lips.)*

Now that I can get at his mouth, he is safe enough. Observe: it works like a charm.

ALF. Really, 'pon my honour—

DOCT. S. How do you find yourself, now?

ALF. When I was in Botany Bay, I—really, 'pon my honour—where am I?—where are my—*(feels for his moustaches)*—doctor!—oh, dear! What terrible thing has happened to me?

DOCT. S. To the best of my judgment, young gentleman, you have paid the barber that shilling, and you and he have made a devilish good bargain: you are relieved of your baboon's mane; and he, with his money, has got his money's worth of the raw material.

MRS. J. Mr. Spooney, as you have now, for the first time since your return from Europe, *finished a sentence*, I presume we can look upon you as restored to your right mind. I therefore take the liberty of summoning you to your allegiance.

(she hands him over to Miss L.)

ALF. My dear Kate, really, 'pon my—

MISS L. Now, Alfred—no more of that!

DOCT. S. In the meantime, Mrs. Jenkins, this lady—between ourselves, a little *passée*, something of a virago, and none the better for spending fifty winters at Tarrytown: but *all* the better for the other fifty, the fifty thousand—hem! As I was saying, lady Jenkins, this lady and I have come to an understanding without your assistance.

Enter ERSKINE, CLARA and CHARLES.

ERSK. My friends, you are welcome, one and all. The Count has received information from his parents which renders his immediate absence from New-York indispensable: but I desired to say to you who have had some agency in making him a member of my family, and who are aware of some differences between us since he became such—that those differences are satisfactorily adjusted. I am glad to make you witnesses of our reconciliation.

Enter MRS. RODNEY.

Madam, you come too late.

MRS. R. It is not too late to congratulate you on your seeming recovery from a recent excitement.

ERSK. Truly, no: it is not: for the *cause* of my excitement has ceased.

MRS. R. Indeed!

ERSK. Indeed.

MRS. R. The Count—the Bavarian nobleman—your son-in-law—has explained certain little affairs to your entire satisfaction?

ERSK. He has done so. And he has made me acquainted with some facts which have not yet been communicated to you. My remark embarrasses you. Very probably. You will, perhaps, guess its meaning, however, when I say to you—the Count was *yesterday* aware of your secret.

MRS. R. Is this true?

CHAS. Perfectly. Instead of being deceived, I deceived you.

MRS. R. Give me—give me that parchment. You have no use for it now: give it me!

(CHARLES *pretends to search his pockets for it.*)

(*Aside to* ERSKINE.) I am partly defeated; but you cannot wholly escape me. In the absence of proof that I alone possess, the marriage is valid

and no power on earth can annul it. (*to CHARLES.*) Quick! give me the parchment!

ERSK. (*producing the parchment.*) Is this the proof you refer to?

MRS. R. (*grasping at it.*) It is mine! give it me!

ERSK. Hold! raise a finger in violence; or lisp but one word of what you know, and I will proclaim your infamy to the remotest corner of the earth. Take yourself home—do you mark? *home!* And if ever again you venture beyond its sea-girt margin, you shall sink under the vengeance you have invoked on others.

MRS. R. Having shown no mercy, I expect none from you. But your threat is idle. This caprice of my fortune has in itself a retributive power, far surpassing any act of yours, and to that I bow in all the bitterness of disappointed hate. But my purpose of vengeance is a part of my being; and life *will not* prove too short for its achievement.

Exit MRS. RODNEY.

ERSK. Miserable, vindictive wretch! And yet, how nearly was I enveloped in her toils!

Enter MRS. SPOONEY.

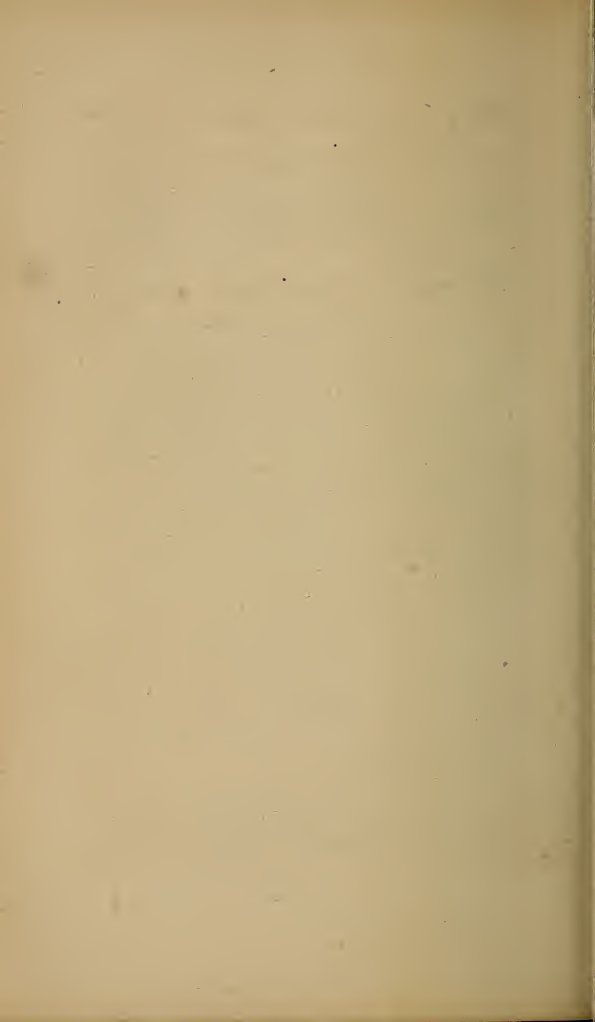
MRS. SP. Where is my son?—oh, Alfred! I saw them taking you into the carriage, and I thought you were killed.

ALF. Don't be alarmed, mother: it's all over now. I was exhausted by the loss of so much hair.

MRS. SP. Oh, dear! you look like a fright!

DOCT. S. Or, like a shaved pig. Never mind, lady:—If he has lost his hair, he has recovered his brains. And I trust he will hereafter remember that true distinction—even in New-York society—is not to be gained by travelling six weeks on the Continent, and coming home with moustaches a foot long.

THE END.



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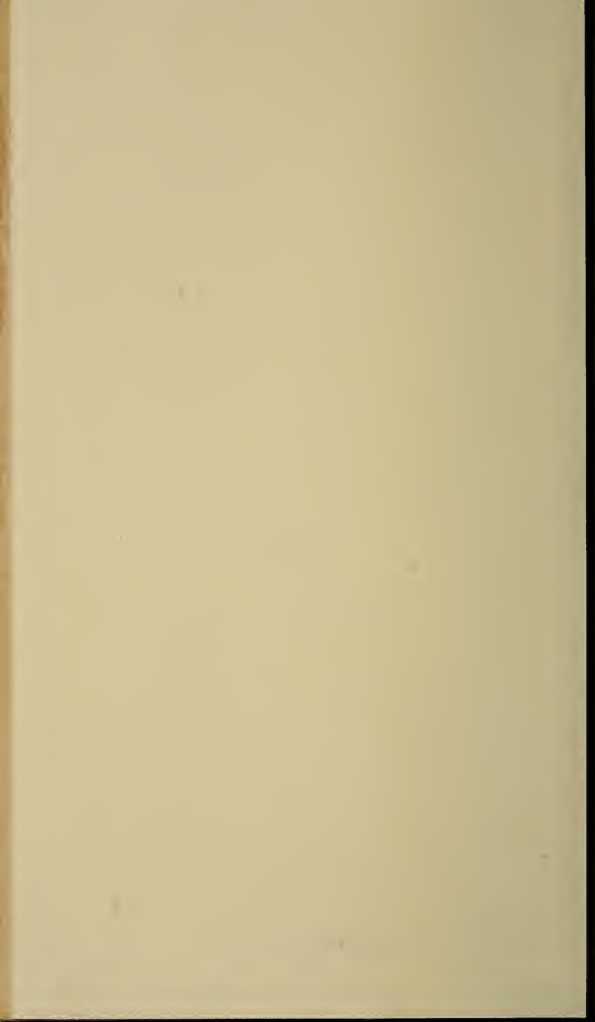


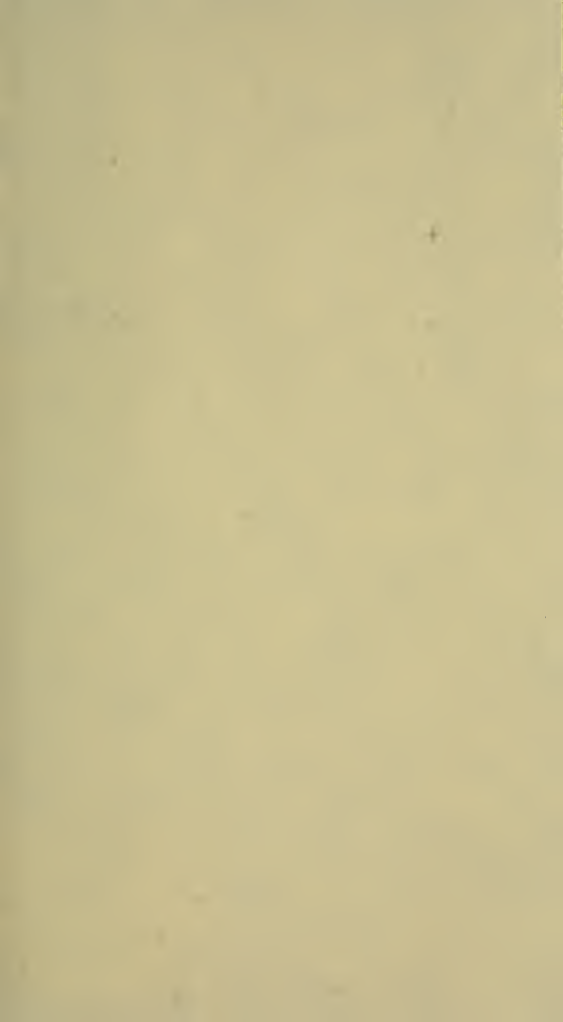
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